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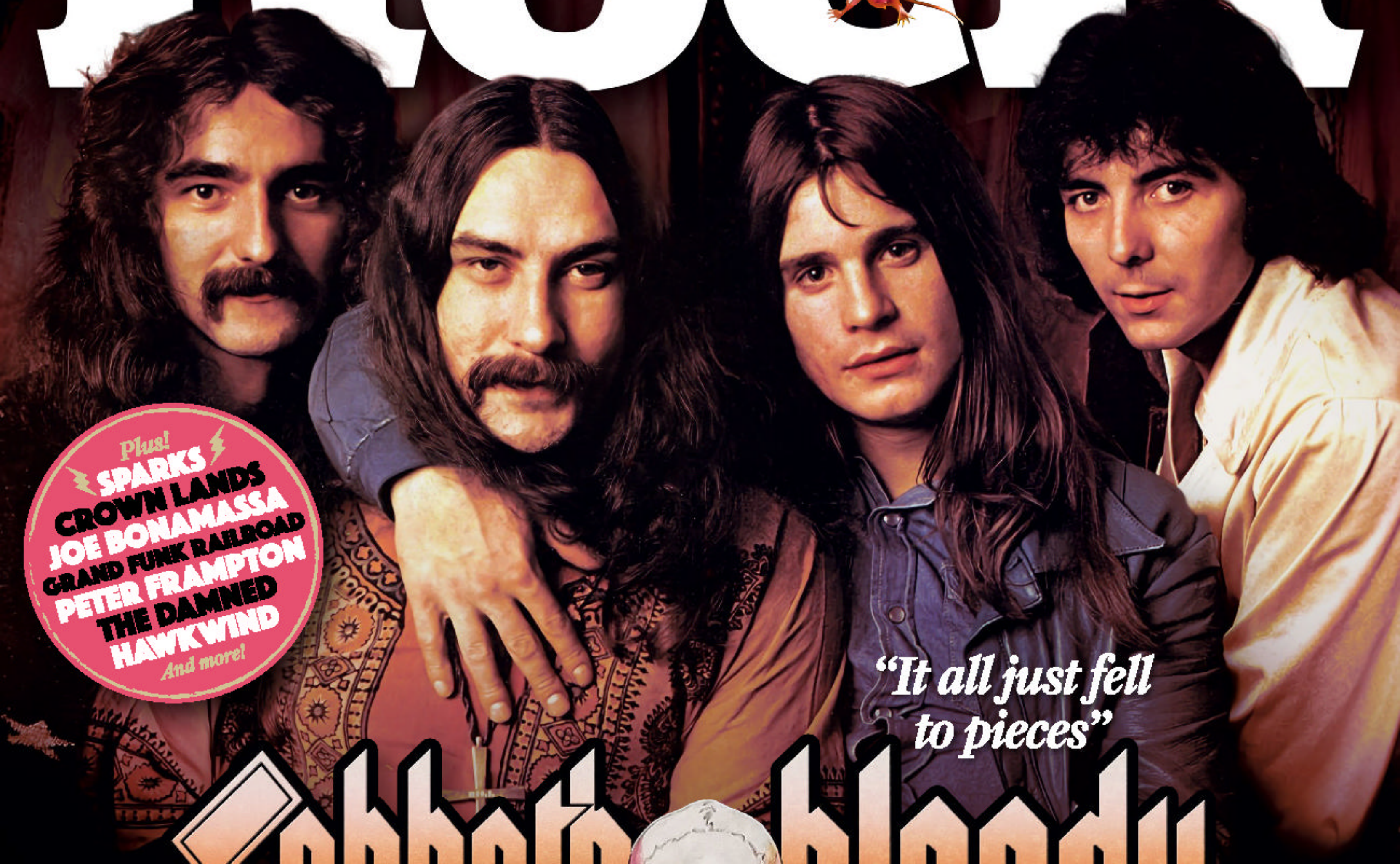
ANDY SUMMERS
"I WOULDN'T HAVE LET THE POLICE GO. IT'S SAD"

★CLASSIC★ Rock



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Sabbath bloody Sabbath

50 YEARS ON

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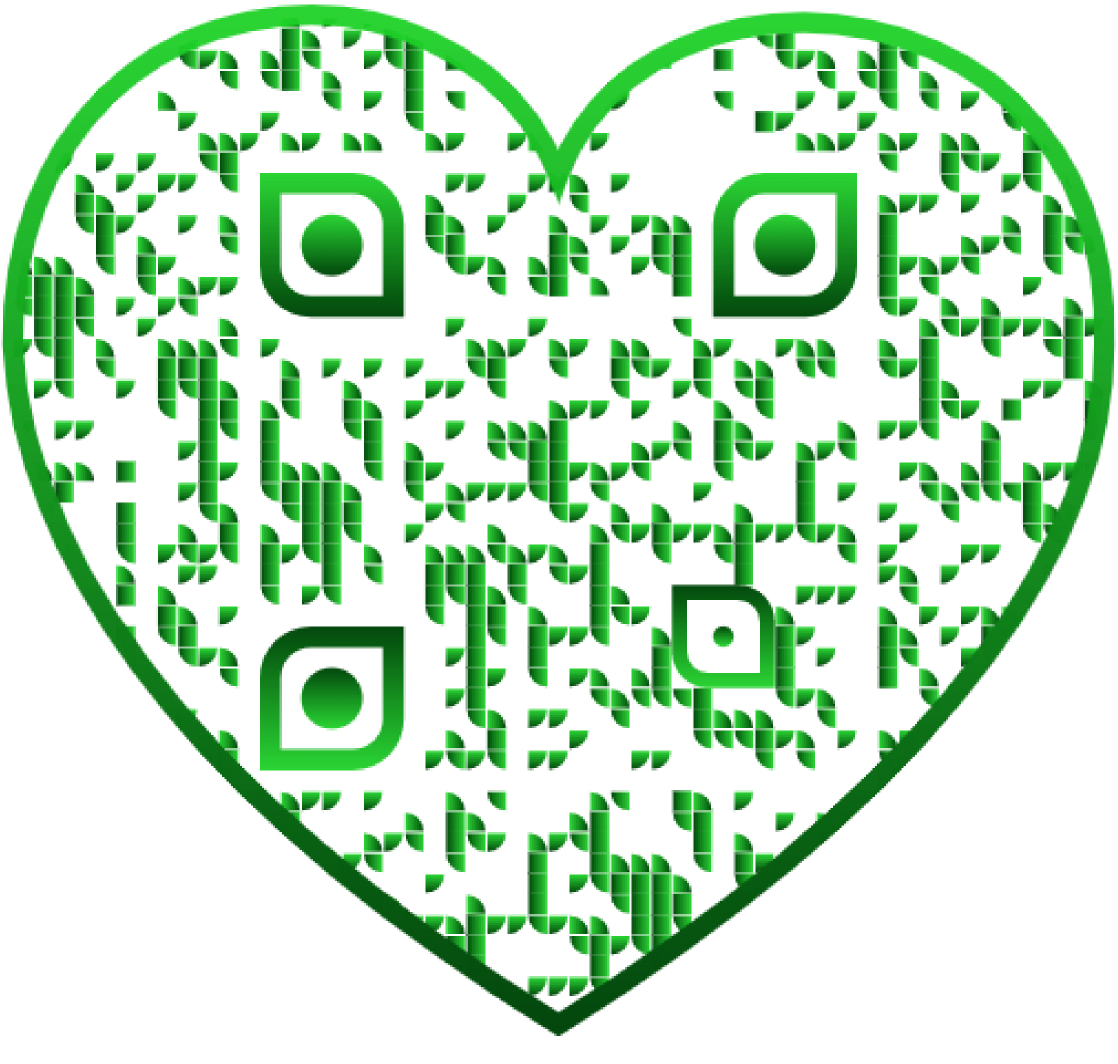
FUTURE

ISSUE 314



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Contents

JUNE 2023 **ISSUE 314**

26
Black Sabbath
"*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was our final record. Then it started to drift around all over the place."

GETTY

8 The Dirt
Multimedia bonanza celebrates Bowie's *Aladdin Sane* at 50; AC/DC, Ozzy and more to play new US festival in July; The Cure battle Ticketmaster… Welcome back Pop Evil, Elegant Weapons and JAAW… Say hello to Gyasi and Island Of Love… Say goodbye to Keith Reid, Seymour Stein, Ray Shulman…

20 The Stories Behind The Songs
George Harrison

22 Q&A
Alice Cooper

24 Six Things You Need To Know About…
Arielle

Cover Feature
26 Black Sabbath
"We'd spend all day farting about and end up with nothing usable." The story of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath.*

36 Andy Summers
The former Police man on working with "two total arseholes", the reunion, his passion for photography, and much more.

46 Crown Lands
Meet the rising modern proggers taking threads from the genre's illustrious past and weaving them into the present.

50 The Damned
With a critically acclaimed new album, they head into the future still with plenty to offer and to thrill.

54 Rodrigo Y Gabriela
With their heaviest album yet, they're taking metal and rock to where no one has so successfully taken it before.

56 Grand Funk Railroad
In the early 70s, no American hard rock band was bigger the GFR. Original singer/guitarist Mark Farner looks back.

60 Sparks
Since their dramatic arrival in the early 70s, they have continued to make extraordinary music on their own terms.

66 The Hot List
We look at some of the essential new tracks you need to hear and the artists to have on your radar. This month they include Ayron Jones, Amy Montgomery, The Bites and more…

71 Reviews
New albums from Def Leppard, The Damned, Clutch, Ian Hunter, Jethro Tull, Hawkwind, Dropkick Murphys, The Mars Volta… Reissues from Rush, Whitesnake, Van Halen, The Kinks, Scorpions, Thunder, Kiss, King's X, Neil Young, The Yardbirds… DVDs, films and books on Def Leppard, Cliff Burton, Jimi Hendrix, Wayne Hussey… Live reviews of The Answer, Pixies, Marcus King, Devin Townsend, W.A.S.P.…

88 Buyer's Guide
Peter Frampton

91 Live
We preview tours by Joe Bonamassa, Hawkwind and Corrosion Of Conformity. Plus gig listings – find out who's playing where and when.

106 The Soundtrack Of My Life
Steve Harley

SUBSCRIBE AND GET 3 FREE GIFTS! p80

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This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of so many classic rock albums. One of which is the last masterpiece from the original Ozzy era of Black Sabbath – namely *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*. Ozzy called it their "final" album. Which, obviously, it wasn't, but it definitely marked a line in the sand for the band's original flush of success. And it wasn't until Tony Iommi came up with the riff for the title track that it all began to come together. Read the story from p26.

Talking of riffs and guitars, this month we grabbed Andy Summers for the Classic Rock Interview (p36) in which he talks about conquering the world in The Police, his 'apprenticeship' with Zoot Money and his long-time passion for photography. Grand Funk Railroad's Mark Farner tells us about being in that quintessential 'American Band' (p56); we discover whether Crown Lands are the spiritual successors to Rush (p46); get the lowdown on all things The Damned (p50); get quirky with Sparks (p60) and so much more.

Until next month...

Siân Llewellyn, Editor

THE COVER: GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

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This month's contributors

ROB HUGHES
Currently a twice-weekly guest on Marc Riley's BBC 6Music radio show, where he digs through vintage copies of old music weeklies, Rob Hughes has been a regular in *Classic Rock*'s pages for well over a decade now. This month he gets to grips with the enduring brilliance of brothers Ron and Russell Mael, aka Sparks. Read it from page 60.

GRANT MOON
The News Editor for our sister magazine *Prog*, Grant has been writing for us for more than 20 years. For this issue he spoke to Mexican duo Rodrigo Y Gabriela about guitars, Grammys and spirituality (p54), and endured some serious hair envy while talking to hirsute Canadian proggers Crown Lands about Rush, royalty and 'boomer bends' (p46).

JOE BOSSO
Joe is a freelance journalist who has interviewed hundreds of guitarists for *Guitar World, Guitar Player, MusicRadar* and *Classic Rock*. He's an enthusiastic guitarist, but nowhere near the likes of the people he interviews. This month we feature his chat with Grand Funk's Mark Farner (p56). Surprisingly, Joe's skills are more suited to the drums. If you need a drummer for your Beatles tribute band, look him up.

CLASSIC ROCK

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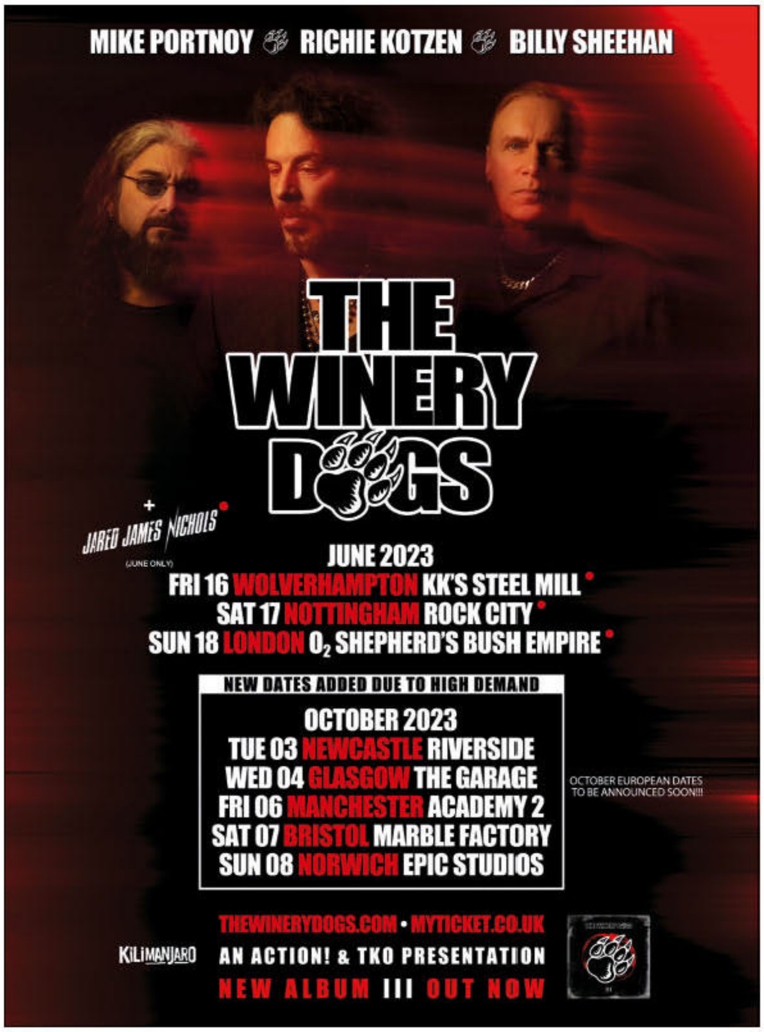
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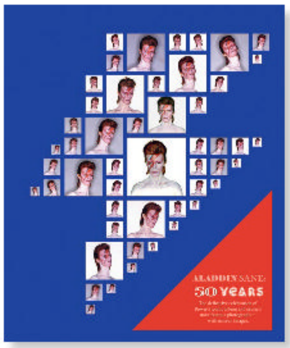
Aladdin Sane At 50

Multimedia bonanza celebrates David Bowie's sixth album and his overall legacy.

The fiftieth anniversary of *Aladdin Sane*, David Bowie's sixth studio album, which introduced songs such as *The Jean Genie*, *Drive-In Saturday* and the title track, is being celebrated with a number of special events, including a two-month exhibition at London's Southbank Centre.

'Aladdin Sane: 50 Years' explores the creation of its artwork, featuring the celebrated lightning flash portrait by photographer Brian Duffy (pictured). Curated by Brian's son Chris Duffy and Geoff Marsh, the exhibition explores the relationship between the musician and photographer, and the January 1973 photo-shoot from which the album's iconic cover image was born, following the journey of the portrait, mapping how Bowie's continuous reshaping of his image paved the way for audiences to rethink their own identities.

"My father's image of Bowie is often called the Mona Lisa of Pop," Chris says. "It's important to remember it was the result of a short studio shoot using film, which then had to be sent out for commercial processing. There were no instant digital images or Photoshop back then. It's extraordinary how it's lasted and been endlessly reworked. Wherever I go in the world, it's always somewhere on a T-shirt."



Southbank Centre Artistic Director Mark Ball says: "We're honoured to pay tribute to David Bowie, who made his Southbank Centre debut in 1969. The *Aladdin Sane* album cover portrait is one of the most influential pop culture images of the past half-century, and its music remains fresh and contemporary."

The collection can be viewed in the Spirit Level at the Royal Festival Hall, and runs until May 28 (£5, free for Members).

The exhibition is complemented by a new book by Chris Duffy, *Aladdin Sane 50: The Definitive Celebration Of Bowie's Iconic Album And Music's Most Famous Photograph*, which contains hundreds of photographs, including dozens of Bowie from the *Aladdin Sane* session that have never been seen until now, along with essays by renowned Bowie experts and authors, is available now in hardback via Welbeck, priced £40.

The Southbank Centre Archive also presents a separate free display exploring Bowie's history with the Centre, from his debut performance in the recently opened Purcell Room in 1969, to later performances alongside Lou Reed, and a curation of Southbank Centre's annual contemporary music festival, Meltdown, showing previously unseen archival material.

In related Bowie news, the Victoria And Albert Museum's exhibition 'David Bowie Is…', which opened as a touring museum in March 2013, is to become a permanent fixture in London with a new home in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London. Its doors open officially in 2025 thanks to a £10million donation from the Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group. The exhibition collates more than 80,000 items.

A spokesperson for Bowie's estate comments: "With David's life's work becoming part of the UK's national collections, he takes his rightful place amongst many other cultural icons and artistic geniuses. The David Bowie Centre For The Study Of Performance – and the behind-the-scenes access that V&A East Storehouse offers – allow David's work to be shared with the public in ways that haven't been possible before, and we're so pleased to be working closely with the V&A to continue to commemorate David's enduring cultural influence."

A third, London-focused, exhibition, titled 'Bowie And Beyond: Ziggy Stardust & Kingston's Music Heritage', examines the remarkable moment that Bowie launched his Ziggy Stardust persona for the first time, at a gig at the Toby Jug pub in Tolworth on February 10, 1972, and also the wider music and pop-culture scene in the borough of Kingston upon Thames. Described as "a curated collection of music memorabilia sourced from local people, original artworks and interviews with people who were there and people who were inspired", it runs at the Art Gallery, Kingston Museum in Wheatfield Way, until September 16. Admission is free. **DL**

Aladdin Sane 1973: Photo Duffy © Duffy Archive & The David Bowie Archive™ / Duffy: © Duffy Archive

This month The Dirt was compiled by Polly Glass, Rich Hobson, Dannii Leivers, Dave Ling, Henry Yates

RIP

Thank you... and good night.

Tom Leadon

September 16, 1952 – March 22, 2023

Guitarist Tom Leadon was a co-founding member of Tom Petty's original country-rock band from the 1970s, Mudcrutch, and returned to the line-up when it reconvened in 2007. His brother Bernie was guitarist with the Eagles. The 70-year-old from Minnesota, who also played bass for Linda Ronstadt and with the band Silver, died of natural causes.

Jim Durkin

February 7, 1965 – March 8, 2023

Californian thrashers Dark Angel are mourning their lead guitarist Jim Durkin, declaring themselves "deeply saddened and crushed" over the loss of the 58-year-old. Durkin had played with Dark Angel from 1981 until a break-up in 1992 before reuniting between 2002 and 2005, and then once again from 2013 until the present day.

Bobby Caldwell

August 15, 1951 – March 14, 2023

New Yorker Bobby Caldwell was a singer, songwriter and musician whose work ranged from soul to jazz and adult contemporary. Having caught a break as a rhythm guitarist for Little Richard, he went on to write hits for Michael Bolton, Chicago and Peter Cetera, among others. 71 years old at the time of his passing, Caldwell died at home in New Jersey in the arms of his wife.

George Atkins Senior

Died March 30, 2023

The original owner of the hugely popular Nottingham venue Rock City has died of unknown cause. George Akins Senior, 94, launched Rock City in December 1980, and it hosted gigs by David Bowie, Guns N' Roses, Nirvana, the Ramones, Megadeth and countless more.
A statement said: "George Senior's passion for entertainment was infectious, and his vision brought together fans and artists alike from all over the world."

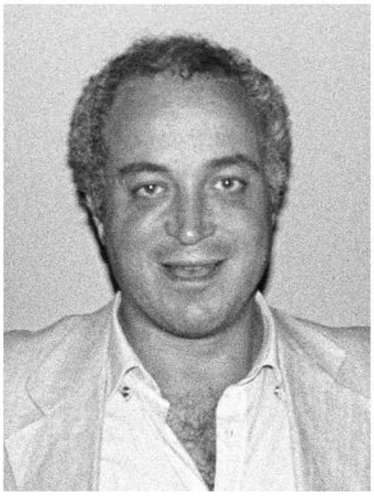
Alan Burridge

Died March 13, 2023

The Motörhead organisation says it will miss Alan Burridge, the editor of *Motörheadbangers*, the band's official fan club magazine since 1979. A group statement described Burridge as a "totemic figure in the world of Motörhead", and "Motörhead's loyal and trusted historian and discographer, writing several books about the band". A close friend of Lemmy, he had been battling multiple sclerosis for some time.

Seymour Stein

April 18, 1942 – April 2, 2023



The co-founder of Sire Records and a vice president of Warner Bros, Seymour Stein became a record industry giant. His list of signings includes the Ramones, The Pretenders, Talking Heads, Ice-T, The Replacements and Madonna, and he introduced British acts such as Fleetwood Mac, Depeche Mode and The Smiths to the US market. Stein was 80 years old when he died. Cause of death has not yet been announced.

Having worked as a clerk at industry bible *Billboard*, he set up Sire Productions in 1966 with producer Richard Gottehrer, and released albums by Barclay James Harvest, The Deviants, Focus and many more.

It was during the punk era that Stein's star really rose. In fact he claimed to have coined the term 'new wave'.

"Ears are very important," he told *The Guardian* in 2018. "If you don't have them, you better hire someone who does. And there are some record companies [where] the heads of whom are not the ear people. The business people may have been fortunate to get the right people around them.

"I was never like that because I could never afford them," he continued. "I had to do all of it. I don't think I'm a bad businessman, and I may not be the greatest A&R man, but I think it's my ears that got me through." **FL/DL**

Mick Slattery

Died March 17, 2023

Former Hawkwind guitarist Mick Slattery, a co-founder of the long-running space-rockers, has died at the age of 77 following a short, unspecified illness. Slattery and fellow guitarist Dave Brock, former members of the band Famous Cure, conceived Hawkwind in 1969 along with bassist John Harrison, and then drummer Terry Ollis, saxophonist and flautist Nik Turner and synth player Michael Davies, aka Dik Mik.

Born in Richmond, Surrey in 1947, Slattery played on an original version of *Hurry On Sundown* recorded by the band known as Hawkwind Zoo, during some studio time to record demos. Some of the demos eventually surfaced on a 1996 reissue of the debut album *Hawkwind* (originally released in 1970). Slattery left Hawkwind in 1969 and was replaced by Huw Lloyd-Langton.

"Myself and Mick played together in a band called Famous Cure in 1967, touring Holland before going on to form Hawkwind," Dave Brock recalled. "I have lots of fond memories from our younger days, playing together in Holland and hanging out in Richmond at the L'Auberge Cafe and Eel Pie Island. During the late sixties, we used to rehearse in my upstairs flat in Putney and also in the basement of Bob Kerr's music shop in Gwalior Road, playing loud music, much to the annoyance of our neighbours."

Brock signed off with the words: "Fly free, old friend."

Reflecting on his exit from the band, Slattery told Hawkwind biographer Carol Clerk: "I think I must have got out of bed the wrong side. I always get fed up with something and just get up and leave with my guitar."

Post-Hawkwind, Slattery moved to Australia. He continued to make music, notably on the group's fringes, in Nik Turner's Space Ritual and Alan Davey's Hawkestrel, and also played in the Australian bands Taman Shud, The Dingoes and Country Radio.

Guitarist Slattery's passing comes four months after that of his former Hawkwind colleague Nik Turner, who died at the age of 82. Brock, who also turns 82 in August, continues to lead the group, and is their sole constant member. **JE/DL**

Keith Reid

October 19, 1946 – March 23, 2023

As the author of the lyrics to Procol Harum's classic *A Whiter Shade Of Pale*, Keith Reid secured a place in rock music immortality. Englishman Reid also wrote other hits, but mostly he is remembered for his huge input to Procol Harum, writing the words to just about all of their songs.

After 76-year-old Reid died from colon cancer, the group issued a statement, describing him as an "unparalleled lyricist". It added that his words were "one of a kind and helped to shape the music created by the band. His imaginative, surreal and multi-layered words were a joy to Procol fans… Our thoughts go out to his family and friends."

Reid co-founded Procol Harum with pianist/singer Gary Brooker in 1967 and the band recorded *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* the same month, and it topped the charts in 19 countries.

"Keith had written the lyrics and posted them to me," Brooker told *Classic Rock*. "I'd been working on a musical idea, which until then had been purely instrumental, when I opened the post and *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* was on the top of other lyrics. I was immediately taken with the immense length of the original four verses with a chorus on each, and the narrative form it took, with its mysterious characters and goings-on." **FL**

GETTY x2

Fuzzy Haskins

June 8, 1941 – March 17, 2023

Parliament-Funkadelic vocalist Clarence 'Fuzzy' Haskins has died at the age of 81. His death was confirmed by former bandmates George Clinton and Bootsy Collins.

Haskins was a founding member of 1950s and 60s doo-wop group The Parliaments – the precursor to Parliament and Funkadelic, later referred to as Parliament-Funkadelic. After leaving the band in 1977, he went solo and released the albums *A Whole Nother Thang* and *Radio Active*. He later formed an 80s Funkadelic line-up that did not include Clinton.

Haskins, who became a church preacher, was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1997 with Parliament-Funkadelic. He also received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019 for his contribution to P-Funk.

In a tweet the HOF said: "As P-Funk pushed boundaries further and further on classic albums like *Mothership Connection* and *Maggot Brain* and set a futuristic pace for Black music, Haskins kept things connected to their street-corner-harmony roots."

Collins posted on social media: "Prayer's going out to Clarence "Fuzzys" Haskins family & friends. We lost his frequency today… We will miss u my friend, bandmate & Soul brother!" **SL**

Ray Shulman

December 8, 1949 – March 30, 2023

The co-founding bassist and composer with progressive rockers Gentle Giant, Ray Shulman, has died at the age of 73 following a long illness. The news was broken by his brother and Gentle Giant bandmate Derek, who posted on Facebook: "I was with him until the end. At least I know he is now at peace."

Derek added: "Ray really was a genius in so many ways. He was such a kind and caring soul, an incredible composer, musician, music producer and tech wizard."

Born in Portsmouth, Ray was the youngest of the Shulman brothers and, along with siblings Derek and Phil became a founder member of Simon Dupree And The Big Sound, who had the memorable 1967 hit *Kites*.

In 1970 the brothers formed Gentle Giant. Ray was among the group's main composers, contributing to all their albums from their 1970 self-titled debut and 1975's US hit *Free Hand*, up to their final studio record, *Civilian*, in 1980. Besides his work with Gentle Giant, Ray Schulman was a record producer with credits including Björk's former band The Sugarcubes. He also composed music for computer games.

Ray played an active role in Gentle Giant's reissues campaign, and in 2020 made a special appearance in the 'reunion' fan video for *Proclamation*. **NS/DL**

Ryuichi Sakamoto

January 17, 1952 – March 28, 2023

RAY SHULMAN: AVALON; GETTY x2

The much admired Japanese composer, record producer and actor Ryuichi Sakamoto, best known for his theme tune for the 1983 film *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, has died at the age of 71. During a lengthy and multi-faceted career, Sakamoto worked with David Bowie, David Sylvian, Brian Eno, Brian Wilson, guitarist Adrian Belew, Iggy Pop and many more, in addition to being a member of the group Yellow Magic Orchestra. Sakamoto won numerous awards, including an Oscar, a Grammy, a Golden Globe and a BAFTA. In 2021 he was diagnosed with cancer for a second time.

Born in Tokyo, he began studying composition at the age of 10, and formed YMO in 1978. He appeared in *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* with David Bowie, and recorded with former Japan frontman David Sylvian for its soundtrack. Its theme song *Forbidden Colours* became a huge hit.

In later years Sakamoto became known as an environmental campaigner, notably in response to the Fukushima nuclear meltdown in 2011.

Former Dare keyboard player Professor Brian Cox Tweeted: "Ryuichi was a big part of my 1980s musical experience – initially for me through his work with David Sylvian and Japan – but of course he leaves a magnificent catalogue of music behind." **DL**

Jim Gordon

July 14, 1945 – March 13, 2023

Tributes have been paid to Jim Gordon, the drummer whose numerous recording credits include Derek And The Dominos, Steely Dan, Joe Cocker, Alice Cooper, John Lennon, Frank Zappa, and also the elite session collective the Wrecking Crew. Gordon, who was jailed for the murder of his mother, waged a lifelong battle with mental illness. He was 77 years old.

Alan 'Taff' Freeman

July 6, 1946 – August 22, 2021

The veteran progressive rock band Nektar have belatedly confirmed the death of their original keyboard player Alan Freeman, who passed away due to complications with dementia during lockdown. "Sadly there are only three of us left now – Ron Howden, Mick Brocket and myself [Mo Moore] – to carry on what we started those many years ago," said a statement. "May you fly high, Taff."

Wayne Swinney

Died March 22, 2013

Wayne Swinney, the guitarist with Memphis-based metalheads Saliva, has died following a brain hemorrhage. He was 59. Formed in 2001, Saliva were nominated for a Grammy and toured with Sevendust, Aerosmith and Kiss. The group's singer, Bobby Amaru, described Swinney as "an incredible human who had zero enemies", adding: "He would go out of his way to make sure you had a good time."

'Sweet' Charles Sherrell

March 8, 1943 – March 29, 2023

Born in Nashville, Charles Sherrell was the bassist and musical director for James Brown's band the JBs from 1973 to '88. He started out playing drums with Jimi Hendrix and Billy Cox, and went on to join Arethra Franklin's backing group. Working for Brown, he played on several huge hits including *Say It Loud – I'm Black And I'm Proud*. Sherrell was 80 years old.

Joshua Madsen

Died March 9, 2023

The former drummer with Danish thrashers Artillery has died in a vehicle accident. Joshua Madsen, 45, was driving from Copenhagen to Roskilde when he had a fatal collision with a bus. He had played with Artillery for a decade, and left earlier this year. "Our thoughts and prayers are with your son and family," said a statement. "Rock on, wherever you are."

Dix Denney

March 12, 2023

Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea was among those to express sadness over the passing of 65-year-old Dix Denney, the guitarist and co-founder of pioneering LA punk band The Weirdos. "Dix was a musician, a painter, a sculptor, an innovator and a maker of instruments. I am grateful to have been his friend," Flea said in a social media post. Denney also played with Thelonious Monster.

AC/DC And Ozzy To Play Festival

A return to the stage awaits after a long time away...

AC/DC are to perform their first live show in seven years in October as part of anew US-based festival called Power Trip. The three-day event – which also features Ozzy Osbourne as its Friday night headliner – boasts a bill that also includes Iron Maiden, Guns N' Roses, Metallica and Tool, and is set to be one of the biggest shows in the history of hard rock and heavy metal.

The inclusions of AC/DC, who have not performed live since 2016, and Ozzy, who earlier this year was reported to have retired from touring due to ill health, are the most unexpected names on the bill.

Ozzy's manager, wife Sharon, told Piers Morgan her husband is "still rocking", adding: "He never stopped. He's back."

Tickets for the festival, which takes place at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California between October 6 and 8, at the regular home of the Coachella Festival, begin at $599 (around £481). **DL**

AC/DC: playing their first show in seven years.

The Cure Versus Ticketmaster

Robert Smith is the latest to take on the global ticket outlet.

The Cure's Robert Smith is the latest artist to be locked in a battle with Ticketmaster over the mark-up of admission costs for a US tour that begins in New Orleans on May 10. The band had attempted to make the gigs affordable by setting low ticket prices, and in a bid to make their position clear Smith wrote in an email to fans: "The Cure have agreed all ticket prices, and apart from a few Hollywood Bowl charity seats, there will be no 'platinum' or 'dynamically priced' tickets on this tour."

Now a furious Smith is "sickened" that Ticketmaster's 'additional' charges – including service fee and order processing – exceed the face value of the tickets.

In his email, Smith stressed: "To be very clear: the artist has no way to limit [the excess charges]. I've asked how they are justified. If I get anything coherent by way of an answer I will let you know."

As this issue went to press, The Cure helped to cancel 7,000 tickets bought by fake accounts and listed on secondary resale sites. **DL**

NEWS

Mammoth WVH, featuring guitarist and singer Wolfgang Van Halen, have announced the release of their second album, *Mammoth II*, on August 4 via BMG. It's preceded by a single, *Another Celebration At The End Of The World*.

Camel cancelled their June tour of the UK due to a health issue with guitarist Andrew Latimer. A statement said: "Throughout his career Andrew has had numerous physical challenges and always overcame them. Camel look to the future for another opportunity to write the final chapter."

Paul Quinn is to cease touring as a member of Saxon, the band he co-founded in 1975. The guitarist will continue to be a part of their recording line-up, and will appear at special selected future shows.

Attorneys representing **Steven Tyler** against a then-16-year-old female he met in 1973, who claims the pair entered into "a romantic, loving relationship", argue that the Aerosmith frontman should be granted immunity from charges of sexual assault, based on alleged given consent on her part and also that Tyler was her legal guardian at the time.

Despite having been inducted as a member of The Pretenders in 2005, **Chrissie Hynde** (pictured) now believes the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame is "total bollocks". She adds: "It's absolutely nothing to do with rock'n'roll, and anyone who [disagrees] is a fool."

WELCOME BACK

JAAW

Therapy?'s Andy Cairns on ducking out of the day job to moonlight with his new industrial-psych project.

As the leader of Northern Irish alt. rockers Therapy? since 1989, Andy Cairns knows a thing or two about death by decibels. But as the moonlighting frontman presents his new industrial-psych collective JAAW – which also includes vocalist Wayne Adams (Death Pedals), bassist Jason Stoll (Mugstar) and drummer Adam Betts (Three Trapped Tigers) – he says he's never been involved in a heavier or trippier project.

How did JAAW come about?
It all happened really quickly. Usually, in my thirty-three years in the business, when someone says to me: "Do you fancy getting together?" it's normally in the pub and you don't hear from them again. Wayne masterminded the project, and within two days he sent me some ideas. How do you pronounce JAAW? Just 'Jaw'. We've done an ABBA. It's the first letter of our names.

> "We've done an ABBA – it's the first letter of our names."

Do JAAW qualify as a supergroup?
I think there's a bunch of super musicians and super people in this band. But if I was reading *Classic Rock* and there was an article about a supergroup, I'd expect a few more zeros at the end of the sales of the artists involved.

You've described the sound of JAAW's debut album, *Supercluster*, as "post-industrial". What are the touchstones?
There were a few bands that were really exciting me when Wayne got in touch. I really like a band from London called Luminous Bodies. They've got two drummers, they're a bit of a Butthole Surfers noise-rock thing. A Brazilian band called Deafkids who reaffirmed my belief in the live music experience. They've got echo on everything. It's trance-inducing, like a ritual. I was listening to a lot of Can and Hawkwind, and Wayne was listening to Godflesh and Type O Negative. We decided JAAW would be really grimy, noisy, industrial and even dirtily cinematic.

Which are the most aggressive tracks?
I actually think it's the slower ones, like *Bring Home The Motherlode, Barry*. That's tuned down to A and done at this glacial pace. That was the one we were all buzzing about at rehearsals, because it's this huge, lumbering beast. When we were halfway through recording it I forgot where I was. I don't mean where I was in the song – I'd literally forgotten where I was.

When should we play this record?
Well, speaking of industrial, I worked in a factory in my early twenties, before Therapy? took off. I used to do night shifts, and there's a certain mind-set at three in the morning, when you're surrounded by huge machines that hiss, grate and sizzle, and your body is saying: "You shouldn't be awake." It's quite a unique experience, and anyone that's ever worked in a factory will tell you that. So I think this record should be played at three in the morning.

How loud will JAAW be live?
If it's anything like the rehearsals, it's going to be insane. Whenever we've rehearsed, it's the loudest rehearsal I've ever been at since early Therapy?, when people used to complain that you couldn't actually hear anything and all they could feel was these massive cabinets pushing air on their chest. And I think this is going to be similar. It has to be loud. The guitars have to be on the verge of feedback. Everything has to be raging and full-on. The whole experience of the *Supercluster* record is something to get lost in. **HY**

Supercluster is released on May 26 via Svart Records.

CHRISSIE HYNDE: KEVIN NIXON

HIGH HOPES

Gyasi

"It was a horrible time. But I wrote a lot of songs... Just finding ways to do the simplest thing."

After an unusual childhood and overcoming an injury, this West Virginia native is on a roll.

Gyasi wasn't like his peers. An androgynous old soul in a very small-town world, he looked to rock stars for inspiration. By the age of four he was playing guitar. A life of rock'n'roll was perhaps inevitable. "I wasn't a redneck driving a big old pickup truck," he says. "I always felt like my masculine and feminine [sides] were equal. So embracing that, writing about that… all that was part of the journey."

It's been an interesting ride, but 2023 could be his year. Together with members of Jack White's band, Gyasi (his real name) recently released the title track of his new EP, *Baby Blue* – an infectious T.Rex-meets-Led Zeppelin marriage of dirty riffs and sass. Within a week it had hit 260k views on YouTube.

This connection with bygone styles began early. Raised in a 'holler' in rural West Virginia, Gyasi had an idyllic childhood in lots of ways. His bohemian family farmed using old techniques, ploughing fields with a mule. Evenings were spent listening to old blues records and watching Charlie Chaplin and Marx Brothers films. "I grew up in the way people grew up in the 1930s," he recalls. "It was so unlike anybody else my age."

At the same time, his Russian neighbours played him music by David Bowie, New York Dolls and Lou Reed. By the age of 10 Gyasi was dressing up and creating alter egos with their daughter. "She would do my make-up and we would create these rock'n'roll characters. The idea of using clothing to communicate, I understood from an early age just how powerful that was."

In high school Gyasi was beaten up regularly. He shaved his head to try to fit in, but grew it out again when he was 16, finding solace in the guitar. "I started to find that my only defence was music," he says. "When I could play guitar, the people that were about to beat me up, they're like: 'Hey, you play guitar pretty good. Can you show me how you do it?'"

From there he moved to Boston to attend Berkeley Music School, where he fell in with the bluegrass and gypsy jazz crowds. A stint with a garage rock duo in Boston followed, after which he moved to Nashville. Gigs and tours were going well until a ripped hand tendon sent him back to West Virginia, where he spent two years recovering. "It was a horrible time," he recalls. "But I wrote a lot of songs. I would just play some chords or open tuning or slide… just finding ways to do the simplest thing."

Armed with material, he recorded it before returning to Nashville in 2017. The same year, he met his wife. A year later his daughter was born. Now, five years on, his debut LP is in the works, promising to build on the glitz and grit of *Baby Blue*.

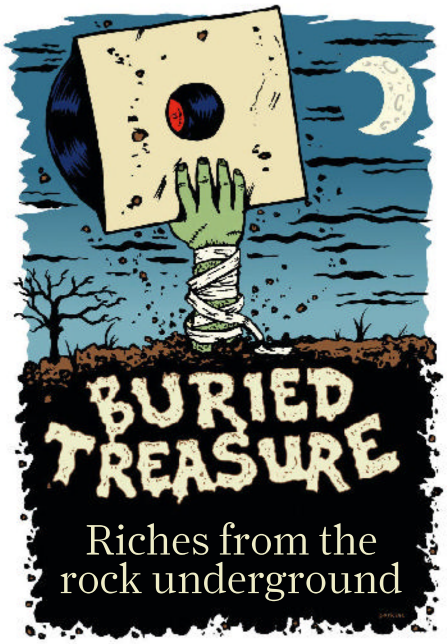
"People tell me I've made them feel less alone," he says. "People who, I think, feel the way I felt when I was growing up. I think my dream is to do that on a bigger scale, on a global scale." **PG**

Baby Blue (EP) is out now via Alive Naturalsound.

FOR FANS OF…

"I've been listening to *Aladdin Sane* a lot," Gyasi says of the Bowie classic, the glamour and attitude of which shines through Gyasi's music. "I really love *Aladdin Sane*. Amazing record. The avant-garde influences, the kind of fearless songwriting and the use of these different landscapes... those are things I really like about that record."

CHAD CRAWFORD/PRESS



GEORGE BRIGMAN

Jungle Rot, Solid Records (private pressing), USA, 1975. £1,000.

George Brigman was an 18-year-old Baltimore-based guitarist/vocalist when he recorded *Jungle Rot*. Initially released in a run of 1,000, it has been bootlegged many times, and original copies are highly sought after by collectors. Allegedly, Brigman had been playing guitar for less than a year prior to the recording. This is somewhat hard to believe, as his understanding of the instrument is more than several steps above rudimentary.

He flew the freak-rock flag high, creating gloriously raw, noisy garage-punk in a psychedelic Stooges kind of vein. You can almost smell the burning weed and get high from the grinding fuzz tones and snarling, slacker-glazed vocal rants of the title track. *I Feel Alright* and *It's Misery* are lo-fi dirges with the rhythm section barely keeping things together. *DMT* is no doubt a homage to the rapid hallucinogenic drug otherwise known as dimethyltryptamine. It sounds like a suitably tranquilised Iggy hollering over a very early rehearsal by 80s British psych-heads Loop. These are things that actually make the record great. It simply wouldn't have worked with a fancy production, and the overall out-there attitude suggests they really couldn't give a fuck either way.

'It's not an album for those who like their rock music polished.'

The album sat in a peculiar place for 1975, at the tail end of prog and the beginning of punk rock, yet it somehow stands the test of time. Being very much a DIY project, though, it's certainly not an album for those who like their rock music polished.

Later there were a couple of great 45s as George Brigman & Split, then in 2007 he returned to being a solo artist with the album *Rags In Skull*. **LD**

NEWS

Roger Daltrey fears that **The Who** won't bother to make new albums any more. "What's the point of records?" he told the *NME*. "We released an album four years ago, it was great and it did nothing."

Nikki Sixx is the latest name to confirm their participation in **Dolly Parton**'s much-anticipated foray into the world of rock. The Mötley Crüe bassist joins a cast that includes **Elton John**, **Paul McCartney**, **Steven Tyler**, REO Speedwagon's **Kevin Cronin**, **Stevie Nicks**, **John Fogerty**, **Steve Perry** and **Cher**.

One person is reported to have been killed and another 28 injured after a tornado ripped the roof off the Apollo Theater in Belvidere, Illinois, before a concert by Death Metal veterans **Morbid Angel**.

Get well soon to **Blaze Bayley**, who has suffered a heart attack that caused the postponement of all his future touring. A statement said the former Iron Maiden singer remains in "excellent spirits", retaining his "strength and sense of humour".

Def Leppard drummer **Rick Allen** (pictured) has thanked first responders and fans for their "overwhelming support" after he was assaulted by a 19-year-old man outside a hotel in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. His attacker was charged with four counts of criminal mischief, one count of misdemeanour battery and one count of aggravated battery.

WELCOME BACK

Pop Evil

Frontman Leigh Kakaty on getting punched in the face, rock'n'roll therapy, and teenage run-ins with the law.

Nobody comes to Pop Evil for a quiet night. Citing such play-on-10 stalwarts as Metallica and Stone Temple Pilots, the black-clad heavy mob from Michigan have shaken the room since their formation in 2001. And seventh album *Skeletons* is perhaps the band's most seismic yet, splicing an alt.rock edge with a hit of metalcore, alongside lyrics that seem like primal-scream therapy for a world facing down its mental health demons. Singer Leigh Kakaty tells us more.

What's the significance of the new album's title, *Skeletons*?

It's simple. We all got 'em, right? Whether they're the skeletons in our past or even just the bones themselves. Musically there was certainly more aggro swirling around our band for this album. It's got very aggressive guitar tones. We wanted to make sure you could bob your head and your horns would go up. Live we don't just sit there and play, we get in your face and try to 'prove' these songs to you.

"We certainly want to help people with our music."

What subjects did you cover with the new songs?

Dead Reckoning is a kind of brutal motivational song. It's about looking at yourself in the mirror and facing the fact that it's got to start with you; you can't put the blame on somebody else. It's like: "I gotta face it, baby. Let's go. Keep punching me in the face, I'm gonna keep moving forward". I wrote *Worth It* for my kids, but it's also for anyone out there whose parents never told you they loved you, when you just wanted to hear those words, man.

You've said that you hope this album this album helps some of those struggling with mental health issues.

Yeah. When it comes to my mental health, it's more of a depression because we're trapped on a tour bus. My dad passed away, and I felt like I was selfishly chasing this dream and I missed out on three or four years that I could have spent with him. So I put a lot of guilt to that. With my family nowadays, being gone for months at a time you definitely struggle. We want to leave our mark and certainly help people with our music. I think back to all those bands that helped when doctors, parents, teachers weren't there for me.

You've always been evangelical about rock'n'roll. Why is this genre so important to you?

We started this journey when rock music was on a decline. We were pushing ourselves up a steep hill, when the musical landscape had shifted to hip-hop, pop and country, and kinda abandoned us rockers. I can sing pop until the cows come home, and a lot of people said to us why don't you just switch genres. And we had the opportunities. But it was like, I'm a rock guy, man. I grew up blue-collar in Michigan. I really feel indebted to this genre. I don't care about the success.

What's the most evil thing you've ever done?

Oh man, I remember shooting out a lot of windows with a BB gun as a kid. I was about fifteen. Some guys chased us. The cops came over to the house. Luckily the guy that did it with us was the sheriff's son, so we got off with a warning. But I had a choice that day which path I was gonna go down. The very next morning, I committed to the guitar. **HY**

Skeletons is out now via MNRK Heavy.

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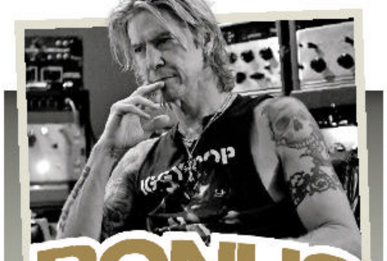


BONUS TRACKS

WHAT'S REALLY IN MY COLLECTION

Duff McKagan

No one will believe I own a copy of...

Kylie Minogue

Ultimate Kylie (2004)

"I have way too many guilty pleasures. I have two daughters, man – there's a lot of pop at my house. How about Antony & The Johnsons? Not guilty enough? Okay, here's one... What's the chick's name? She's about my age... Kylie Minogue! Her music is real good rubbish."

I break the speed limit to...

Refused

The Shape Of Punk To Come (1998)

"Easy choice. Punk has always been my thing, more than metal. The most I've ever been into metal is when I was in a punk rock band called The Fartz and I got into Iron Maiden and Tank and Motörhead."

The album that broke my heart...

Prince

Crystal Ball (1998)

"This was completely forgettable! Way too many fuckin' horns. I like that he was directionless – there's still brilliant stuff on there – but the whole three-CD thing was too much. I loved *Diamonds And Pearls*. That came out at a very memorable time in my life. I could talk about Prince all day. I'm his biggest fan."

The album I wish I'd made is...

Soundgarden

Down On The Upside (1996)

"That last Soundgarden album was fuckin' killer. I could name any Soundgarden record for this question, actually. I would love to have been part of any of their albums. I wish I'd been in Jeff Buckley's band, too, or that I'd gotten to play with Prince."

WORDS: JOEL McIVER

NEWS

Lynyrd Skynyrd will continue as a touring band despite the recent death of guitarist Gary Rossington, their last original member, commencing with a co-headlining US tour with ZZ Top in the summer. The decision was reached by the current line-up, fronted by Johnny Van Zant, and the estates of Rossington, original singer Ronnie Van Zant and guitarist Allen Collins.

Kiss are to have their own biopic, which will come to Netflix in 2024. Band manager Doc McGee reveals that it tells the story of "the first four years of Kiss". The cast is yet to be confirmed.

Thin Lizzy have been voted Ireland's greatest band of all time in a poll of more than 10,000 people, securing 60.5% of the vote in a head-to-head showdown with U2.

Grammy-winning American band **Greta Van Fleet** release their third studio album, *Starcatcher*, on July 21 via Lava/Republic/EMI Records.

Ronnie Wood and Aerosmith's **Joe Perry** have been added to the line-up of the two **Jeff Beck** (pictured) tribute concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall on May 22 and 23.

Former Van Halen and Chickenfoot bassist **Michael Anthony** has formed a new, as yet unnamed band with current Bon Jovi guitarist **Phil X** and Aerosmith's touring drummer John Douglas. Some rumours suggest the band's lead singer will be **Jeff Scott Soto**.

WELCOME BACK

Elegant Weapons

Judas Priest's Richie Faulkner has teamed up with members of Pantera and Rainbow, and it's a real band.

A GUITARIST IN Judas Priest since 2011, Richie Faulkner has made a habit of rubbing shoulders with heavy metal royalty. But after an on-stage heart aneurysm in 2021 – and with a warning from fellow Priest guitarist Glenn Tipton that Priest won't be around forever – Faulkner has assembled Elegant Weapons, his own all-star post-Priest retirement plan. Their debut album *Horns For A Halo* is a blast of triumphant, classic-style heavy metal, but the way Faulkner sees it they're carrying the torch for the next generation.

Was your on-stage aneurysm in 2021 a kick up the arse to get something going outside of Priest, as well as telling you to look after yourself?

It definitely put things in focus! I can be a lazy bugger, so it gave me focus to finish all these melodies and riffs I'd got lying around. Now I look at it as, if you've got something you want to accomplish, there's no time like today. I've got a young daughter, so I want to be around as much as I can, but I don't want to leave unfinished business.

> "If I did something more modern just to fit in, it wouldn't feel organic."

In Elegant Weapons you've got an all-star cast with Priest drummer Scott Travis, Pantera bassist Rex Brown and Rainbow singer Ronnie Romero. How do they all fit into the group?

I got Scott and Rex involved after the material was already written. I'd always promised Scott that if I ever did anything outside of Priest he'd be my number-one choice, and Rex and I have been good friends for years. Then Ronnie is the head of the class when it comes to the new breed of classic singers. We've already started working on the next record. Ultimately we want to use everyone's input and creativity, as that will offer a deeper creative energy. I'm really excited to see how this band will evolve over time and create roots of our own.

In addition to the obvious Priest DNA, there are shades of Dio and Scorpions on *Horns For A Halo*. Was it a conscious thing to call back to metal's glory years?

Well, I was born on the first day of 1980 and grew up in the eighties, so that's part of who I am. I couldn't shy away from that. If I were to do something more modern just to fit in with what's happening now, it wouldn't feel organic.

Which track on *Horns For A Halo* do you think most demonstrates what Elegant Weapons are all about?

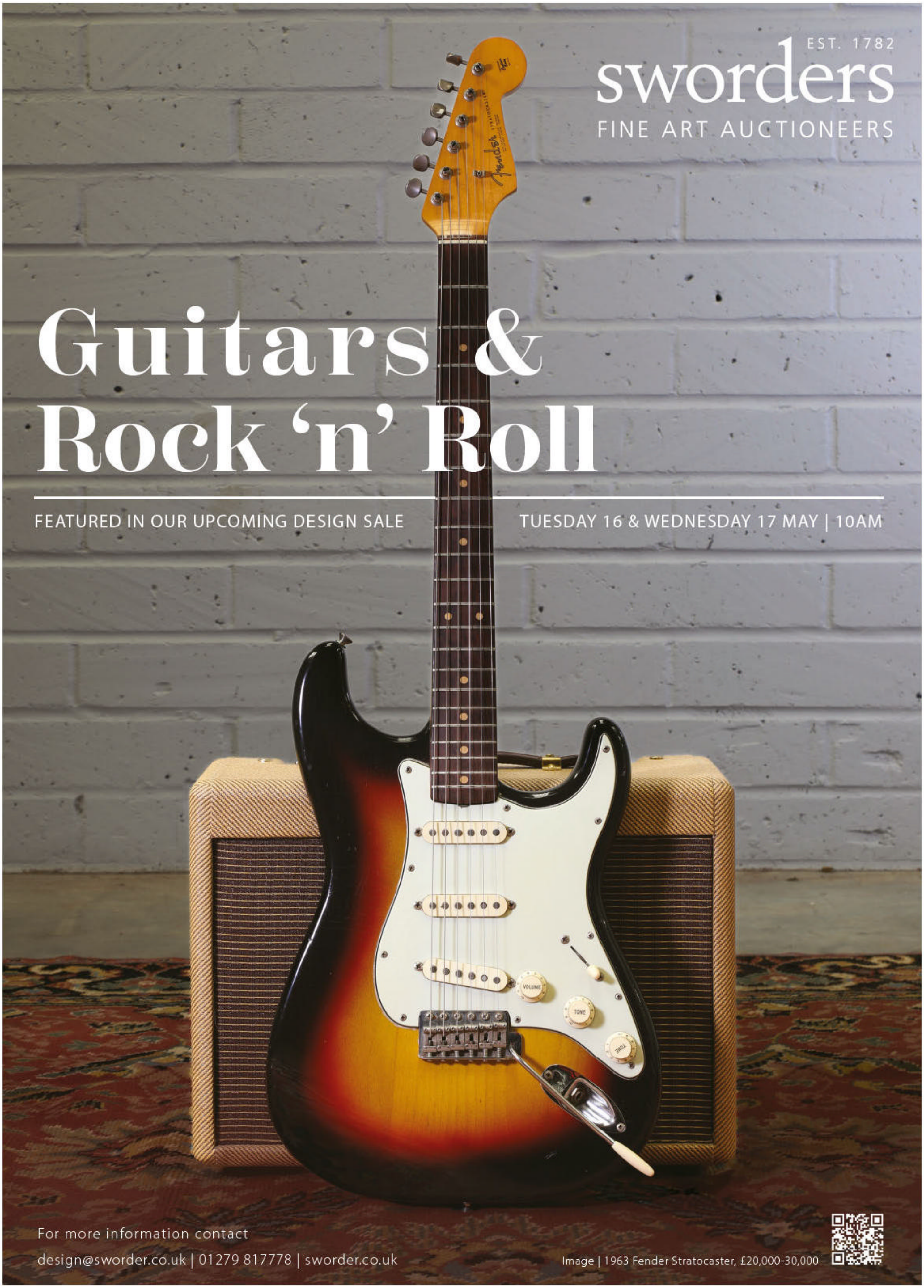
White Horse has all these twists and turns that, to me at least, remind me of [Ozzy's] *Diary Of A Madman*. It changes vibe in a few areas and I really like that dynamic. There's something to be said for a song that can take you on a journey through beauty and ugliness, and *White Horse* is that.

Does it help to be working with other musicians who also joined legendary bands in their later years?

There's a sense that we need to carry on the legacy, definitely. We've been accepted into these behemoth bands – Priest, Rainbow… There's a sense of responsibility to carry on when these bands retire. We're going to do what we can to carry the torch to the next generation of musicians who can take it somewhere completely different. Even if we don't, we'll have a damn good time doing it! **RH**

'Horns For A Halo' is out on May 26 via Nuclear Blast. Elegant Weapons play the Steelhouse Festival in July.

JEFF BECK: JOBY SESSIONS; DUFF McKAGAN: SCOTT DUDELSON/PRESS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FEMME FATALE 'S/T'
BANG TANGO - 'PSYCHO CAFÉ'
ICON - 'S/T'
TNT - 'TELL NO TALES'
TNT - 'INTUITION'
JOE LYNN TURNER - 'RESCUE YOU'
DIRTY LOOKS 'TURN OF THE SCREW'
LOVERBOY - 'WILDSIDE'
LOVERBOY - 'KEEP IT UP'
COMING VERY SOON
MOTHER'S FINEST - 'LIVE'
STRIDER - 'MISUNDERSTOOD'
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• KANSAS - WHY THE WAYWARD SONS ARE STILL CARRYING ON!
• BAD ENGLISH - JOHN WAITE ON THE RISE AND FALL OF THE JOURNEY/BABYS SUPERGROUP
• ALDO NOVA - HE SWEARS HE'LL BE BIG AGAIN
• WINGER - "I'M REALLY FORTUNATE."
• SIMON KIRKE - RAPID FIRE RECALL
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★ HIGH HOPES

Island Of Love

Nothing to do with *Love Island* (thankfully), their 'nice' songs come laced with energy and edge.

"I've always hated sugar-coating things that, at their core, are actually kind of ugly," says Island Of Love guitarist/vocalist Karim Newble. "We came up in the UK in the hardcore, punk and metal scene where music was noisy, heavy and really unattractive, and I feel like there's beauty in that being what it is."

The London-based band's bittersweet alt.grunge, which Newble describes as "pretty music covered in spikes", has drawn comparisons to the warm, unpolished fuzz fests of the lo-fi giants of the 80s and 90s: Dinosaur Jr, Teenage Fanclub, early Weezer. "A lot of stuff I was writing was worshipping [indie veterans] Duster and Sebadoh," he says, remembering the early writing sessions with bandmate Linus Munch.

The pair, who began passing demos back and forth in 2020, had quickly determined that their passion lay in exploiting the sweet spot between spit and polish.

"The stuff Linus was writing was more in the lane of The Strokes, more power-pop," says Newble. "We had played in other bands before, and always spoken about starting a band [together], and it just spewed out of us. We didn't really collaborate too much on writing, it was more adding bits to each other's songs."

In 2020, Island Of Love's cotton wool-esque first EP, *Promo Tape*, caught the ears of Jack White's Nashville-based label Third Man Records, which had just set up a record shop in London. A year later, label co-owner Ben Swank booked the band to play a set in the shop's Blue Basement gig space. After their set, it took Swank just long enough for the band to open a beer and light a ciggie before offering them a record deal. They would be the label's first signees, although they didn't get to meet White until 2022, when they opened for him at a gig in Cologne.

"We met him very briefly," remembers Munch. "We were cooling down and he goes: 'Oh, nice to meet you guys,' and then he runs off again." He pauses, before adding: "Maybe he's not the biggest fan."

Joking aside, though, the partnership has proven to be the perfect match. "They've let us take a lot of leaps of faith," Newble says of the label's supportive approach.

Last year the band recorded their self-titled debut album with producer Ben Spence, before handing it over to Jack Shirley, the Deafheaven producer notorious for his wall-of-sound approach, for mixing and mastering. The result is an album that explores textures and sunny hooks without ever smoothing out the frayed edges of the band's sound.

"If some people take the sweet side of it and think they're like nice songs, that's cool," shrugs Munch. "And if some people take the heavier side of it and think it's a loud, high-energy album, that's cool as well." **DL**

Island Of Love is out May 12 via Third Man Records.

FOR FANS OF...

The origins of Island Of Love's lo-fi rattle can be heard in the sprawling pop melodies and ear-bleeding fuzz of Dinosaur Jr's third studio album, *Bug*.

"We get compared to Dinosaur Jr a lot," says Newble. "They always had that mentality of trying to play nice music really loud, which is one of the commonalities we have with them."

"We get compared to Dinosaur Jr a lot. They always had that mentality of trying to play nice music really loud."

THE STORIES BEHIND THE SONGS

George Harrison

My Sweet Lord

Written after the former Beatle had been inspired by an old gospel song, it's remembered as much for the plagiarism legal battle it led to as it is for just being a lovely song.

Words: **Bill DeMain**

It was the mantra that took over the world. George Harrison's first solo No.1 single stands alone in rock history for going against the secular grain as a full-on love song to the Creator. While there'd been some precedent with both the Beach Boys' *God Only Knows* and Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit In The Sky*, *My Sweet Lord* was different. The lyric offers nothing but praise – loaded with 40 'Lord's 16 'hallelujah's and nine 'Hare Krishna's.

Harrison started writing the song while he was on tour with Delaney & Bonnie in Sweden in late 1969. His main inspiration for it was *Oh Happy Day*, an old gospel tune rearranged into a hit that year for the Edwin Hawkins Singers. Responding to that record's joyful call-and-response vibe, Harrison said: "It really just knocked me out… I just felt a great feeling of the Lord. So I thought: 'I'll write another *Oh Happy Day*, which became *My Sweet Lord*."

Harrison knew the song was both a departure and a commercial risk, both in its spiritual theme and its specific references to the Hare Krishna movement, which back then was a favourite punch bag of comedians.

"I was sticking my neck out on the chopping block," Harrison wrote in his autobiography *I Me Mine*. "I thought a lot about whether to do it or not, because I would be committing myself publicly and I anticipated that a lot of people might get weird about it."

But he was driven by an aim much loftier than simply getting a song in the charts. Raised Catholic, Harrison had become interested in Hinduism in the mid-60s. In 1968 he convinced the other Beatles to attend the Rishikesh retreat with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Of the four, Harrison was the most serious student, and through learning the principles of transcendental meditation he began to delve deeper into Eastern spiritual ideas.

One of those was monism, or being one with a universal supreme being. In Harrison's mind, *My Sweet Lord* could be both a call to faith and a way to transcend barriers between various religions.

Harrison first gave the song to Billy Preston, who recorded it for his 1970 album *Encouraging Words*. Released as a single on Apple, it was a minor hit in parts of Europe.

For Harrison's own version, producer Phil Spector assembled an all-star cast at Trident Studio, including Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton, Ringo Starr and all four members of Badfinger.

That thrilling intro is the sound of what Harrison called "one huge guitar".

Frampton recounted the session in *CR*'s Classic Rock interview: "George called to say: 'Would you come and play some acoustic? Phil wants like *nineteen* of everything.' It was just me and George sitting on two stools with guitars in front of the glass at Abbey Road, and there's Phil Spector. Very surreal. It's one of those moments that I will never ever forget."

Against the wall of layered acoustic guitars, Harrison dropped in two electric slide guitars in harmony, a ragged, beseeching vocal that yearns through the song's key modulations, plus a lively vocal chorus. "I did the voices singing '*Hallelujah*' first and then the change to '*Hare Krishna*'," Harrison said, "so that people would be chanting the Maha Mantra before they knew what was going on."

With each part of the arrangement urging the next, the song continually crescendos into what Harrison called "a mystical sound vibration".

That vibration topped the charts in 18 countries, including the US and the UK. It also won a Grammy and an Ivor Novello, and helped pushed Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* album to No.1. But in the middle of the clamour around the song, it caught the attention of Bright Tunes Publishing, who heard a similarity to a song they controlled – The Chiffons' 1963 hit *He's So Fine*, written by Ronnie Mack. They filed suit for copyright infringement. To complicate matters, Bright Tunes was simultaneously being sued by Mack's family, for unpaid royalties, while Allen Klein, who represented all The Beatles except Paul McCartney, was negotiating to buy Bright Tunes on Harrison's behalf, as a quick settlement (it was almost a tacit admission of guilt).

It was five years before the case was heard in court. The highlight was Harrison playing guitar in front of the jury, trying to demonstrate the finer points of how his song differed from *He's So Fine*.

In the end, a verdict of "subconscious plagiarism" cost Harrison 1.6 million dollars and set a precedent for similar lawsuits in the decades to come.

The finer points of penalties and payments were hashed out for years, and by the time the case was closed in 1998, Harrison controlled publishing rights for both songs in the UK and US, while Allen Klein had rights for the rest of the world.

"The only shame about it was if the writer of *He's So Fine* had been alive in the first place, there probably would have never been a lawsuit," Harrison said. "God knows I never sued anybody about all the songs of mine that got stolen."

'The song continually crescendos into what Harrison called "a mystical sound vibration".'

Despite the stigma of the court case, it's *My Sweet Lord*, not *He's So Fine*, that has endured. And really, Harrison just borrowed a few bricks from a slight pop song and built his Taj Mahal. "I don't feel guilty or bad about it," he wrote in *I Me Mine*. "In fact, it saved many a heroin addict's life. I know the motive behind writing the song in the first place, and its effect far exceeded the legal hassle."

In 2021, *My Sweet Lord*'s 50th-anniversary year, a new video was released, which features musician cameos from Ringo Starr, Jeff Lynne and Joe Walsh. Director Lance Bangs said: "The approach was to represent the song visually while these agents and inspectors keep missing the metaphysical wonder around them."

George would surely have approved.

HEILEMANN/CAMERA PRESS

GETTY

SLIDE RULES

How is it that George Harrison never once played slide guitar on a Beatles track? He acknowledged that what became the keening sonic trademark of his solo years was influenced by his sitar studies with Ravi Shankar and a love of the instrument's microtonal possibilities.

"Indian music gave me a greater sense of rhythm and syncopation," Harrison told *Guitar Player* in 1987. "Then with the slide what I could do is actually hit the string with one stroke and do a little wobbly bit. The Indian music got inside me to a degree that it had to come out somewhere."

THE FACTS

RELEASE DATE
November 1970 (US), January 1971 (UK)

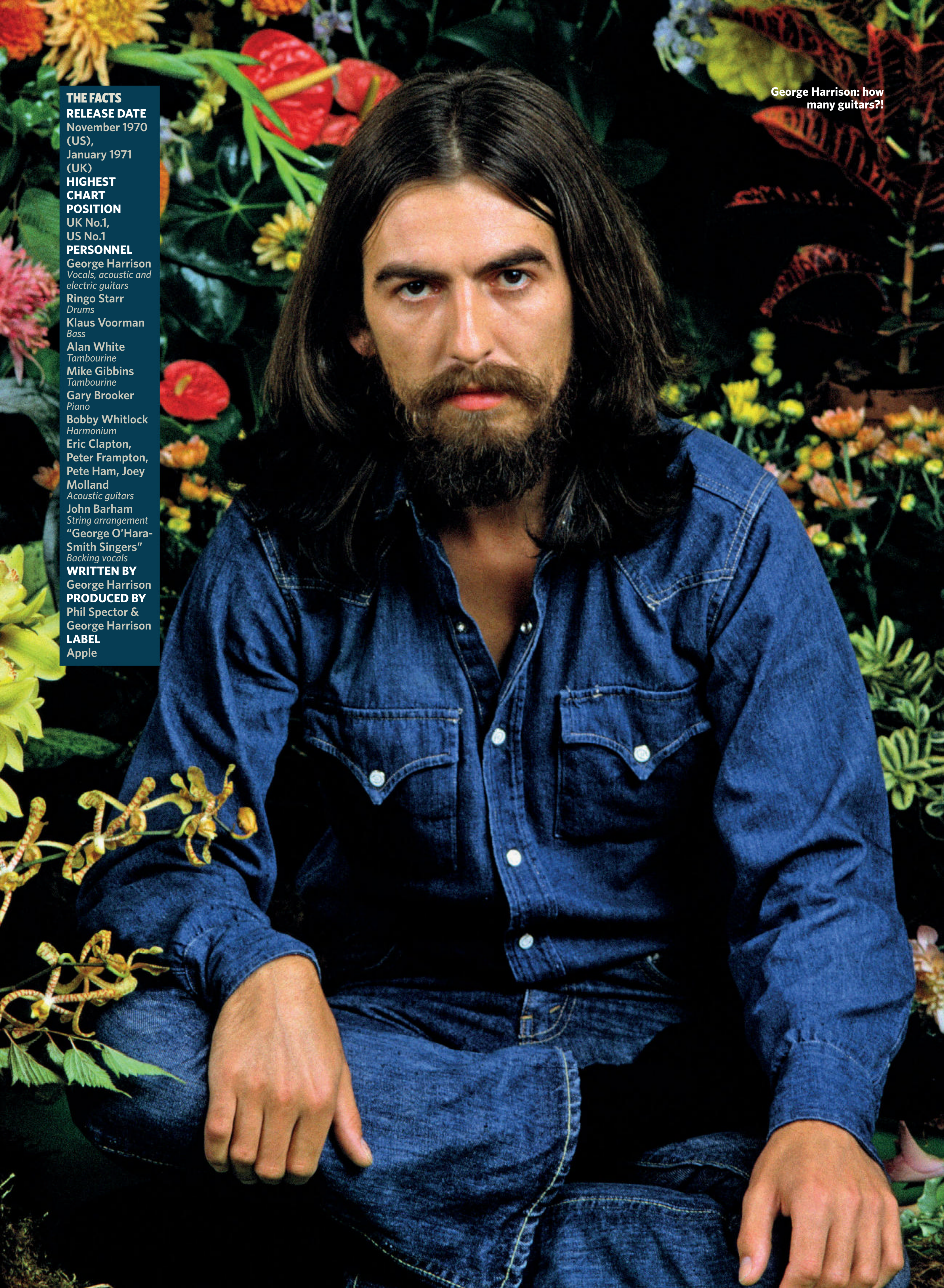
HIGHEST CHART POSITION
UK No.1, US No.1

PERSONNEL
George Harrison *Vocals, acoustic and electric guitars*
Ringo Starr *Drums*
Klaus Voorman *Bass*
Alan White *Tambourine*
Mike Gibbins *Tambourine*
Gary Brooker *Piano*
Bobby Whitlock *Harmonium*
Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton, Pete Ham, Joey Molland *Acoustic guitars*
John Barham *String arrangement*
"George O'Hara-Smith Singers" *Backing vocals*

WRITTEN BY
George Harrison

PRODUCED BY
Phil Spector & George Harrison

LABEL
Apple



George Harrison: how many guitars?!

Q&A

Alice Cooper

The godfather of shock-rock on the Hollywood Vampires, having a stress-free life, and never expecting to live past 30.

Interview: **Ian Fortnam**

There's no 'off' switch on Alice Cooper. Even as the legendary shock-rock icon, Hollywood Vampire and consummate master of the macabre attended his recent 75th birthday party – hosted by *Poison* songwriter Desmond Child in Nashville – his mind kept wandering to the minutiae of his next tour. "I'm the Ziegfeld of rock," he says. "It's all about the show. All I can think is: 'Will that thing work in the second song?'" Prior to hitting the road with fellow Vampires Joe Perry, Johnny Depp and Tommy Henriksen, Alice is busy recording a pair of albums with producer Bob Ezrin and preparing his next all-important stage extravaganza. "Preparing an entirely new production is the calm before the storm… The fun part."

Fifty years on from the release of *Billion Dollar Babies*, are there plans to expand the album to an even greater extent than its 2001 Deluxe Edition?
Oh yeah. We're putting a billion dollars into it. Actually? We're not… I rarely have anything to do with reissues. We have approval, but when they're planning to put my baby shoes in the box and things like that, I just go: "Okay, I don't care. Go ahead." As much as I love the history of the original band, I don't sit around thinking about it; I'm all about what's next.

You had just turned twenty-five when the album was released. Could you have imagined that you'd still be a professional decapitee at seventy-five?
There wasn't one human being on the planet that thought we'd get past thirty years old. In fact, when I turned thirty all my friends clubbed together and got me a wheelchair. I never thought of getting to seventy-five. But I quit drinking and taking drugs very successfully, I've been happily married for forty-seven years, so all the stress is out of my life. Stress kills people faster than anything else, worrying about money, career. I've nothing to prove any more.

You're involved with Tommy Henriksen's Crossbone Skully project.
Tommy's a Vampire, so when he started this project we all wanted in. He asked if I wanted to be a character. I'd have been surprised if he hadn't asked me, Johnny and Joe. The Vampires have been together for seven years and never had an argument. Everybody has fun, nobody complains: 'I didn't get the right bottle of wine backstage.' We've been around long enough not to care about that stuff.

Speaking of the Hollywood Vampires, you're back and preparing to tour.
I hadn't seen Johnny or Joe for three and a half years. We finished the last tour and covid happened. So I walked into the dressing room, saw Johnny and said: "So-oooo… What's new? [Laughs] Did I see you on television or something." Then I told him: "I either have the best or the worst idea of all time… You and Amber [Heard, ex-wife] should do a remake of *The War Of The Roses*. It'd be a bloodbath. Every day there'd be something in the paper about somebody throwing a shoe or something. Then to make it go over the top, have Brad [Pitt] and Angie [Jolie] as your lawyers." He started laughing and then he went: "That's not a bad idea."

There's been talk of the third Hollywood Vampires record being a live album. Might you be looking to source one from the forthcoming tour?
The band is really good live, so that wouldn't be a bad idea. We're doing two months in Europe and taping every single night. We could use one song from Belfast, the next from Budapest. A song from each night would be pretty cool.

You go way back with Joe Perry.
In 1984 I was going to do a horror movie [*Monster Dog*] in Spain, and Joe and I were going to write some songs for it. So we went up to my manager's house in Copiague, New York, and things kept going missing: my harmonica, Joe's strings. Later, at dinner, it sounded like somebody was moving furniture in the basement. It wasn't like in the movies where people say: "Let's get flashlights and go down there." We were out of there. I called Shep [Gordon, manager] and he goes: "Oh yeah, *The Amityville Horror* was written about that house." I was like: "And you were going to tell me when?"

Did you make contact with Aerosmith, or they with you, when they first entered rehab, and in such situations what's your first piece of advice?
Whatever it takes. I never went to AA. When I came out of the hospital I had absolutely no desire to drink. And I was the classic alcoholic. When I came out it was like a Biblical miracle and, being a religious person, I look at it like God took it away from me. But the guys in Aerosmith were in AA every day, and I really admired that.

Are you the go-to guy for celebrities looking for a way out of alcohol addiction?
I was the Dean Martin of rock, the guy on a permanent golden buzz. So everyone thought: "If Alice Cooper can stop drinking, so can I." So I'd get calls from movie stars and rock stars looking to get sober. I don't mind that role, because maybe that's why it was taken away from me, so I can help other people.

How far are you into writing and recording a follow-up to (2021 album) *Detroit Stories*?
I'm doing two albums at once with [producer] Bob Ezrin. Two totally different concepts. The next one's very guitar-driven hard rock. The album after's quirkier. We have to finish recording before the tour. We work quickly. I don't understand why it takes bands five months to do an album. I write songs, go in the studio, we play it live and I do a working vocal. So everything's live in the studio. It might not be perfect, it's not going to sound like a Queen album, but it's going to have lots of feel on it.

Hollywood Vampires' UK tour begins on July 5. Tickets from www.aegpresents.co.uk

“All the stress is out of my life. I’ve nothing to prove any more.”

JENNY RISHER/PRESS

Arielle: California dreamin' and taking you back to '73.

ROB BLACKHAM/PRESS

6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT…

Arielle

The guitarist and singer-songwriter on choirs, clowning and heart-to-hearts with Brian May, ahead of her game-raising new album.

Words: **Polly Glass**

As a young hopeful in Los Angeles, Arielle confronted label execs who wanted to turn her into something she wasn't. Now an independent artist with a '73 VW van, a signature instrument by Brian May Guitars and some of the lushest chops in the business, she's hit a peak with her new album *'73*. Songs about love. Songs about remembering to stop and look around once in a while. All of it in a gorgeous palette of guitar tones (from rootsy slide to Zeppelin-esque rock) and clear, emotive vocals that land somewhere between Stevie Nicks and Sheryl Crow. "I feel like I'm learning what life is about," says Arielle, who threw herself into guitars aged 14, after the death of her father. "I get it wrong a lot."

Happiest making music, working on guitars or walking her border collie, when we speak, she's in Norfolk helping a friend build a recording studio.

Arielle is a lifelong nomad.
With previous addresses including Florida, Hawaii, New Jersey, Texas, LA and the UK, Arielle tentatively cites Nashville as her current base. Not that she doesn't dream of a more fixed abode… "I would love to have a farm and to build a recording studio there, and a garage to work on my buses, a few sheep for my dog to herd, maybe a separate cottage where my friends would be able to come and get to be in nature and create or rest or whatever. I'd really like to have a little home base like that."

As a child she craved guitars, but started out as a singer.
By the age of five, Arielle was already a promising singer, touring across the length and breadth of Europe with a choir. The classical nature of the gig (reading sheet music, singing in Latin and German) gave her a good theory-based foundation, which would later hold her in good stead – feeding into the melodic, vocal-like quality of her playing. "The guitar sings," she says proudly, of her own instrument 'Two-Tone', "it does things that I can't do with my voice. But the choir really helped with understanding theory and harmonisation."

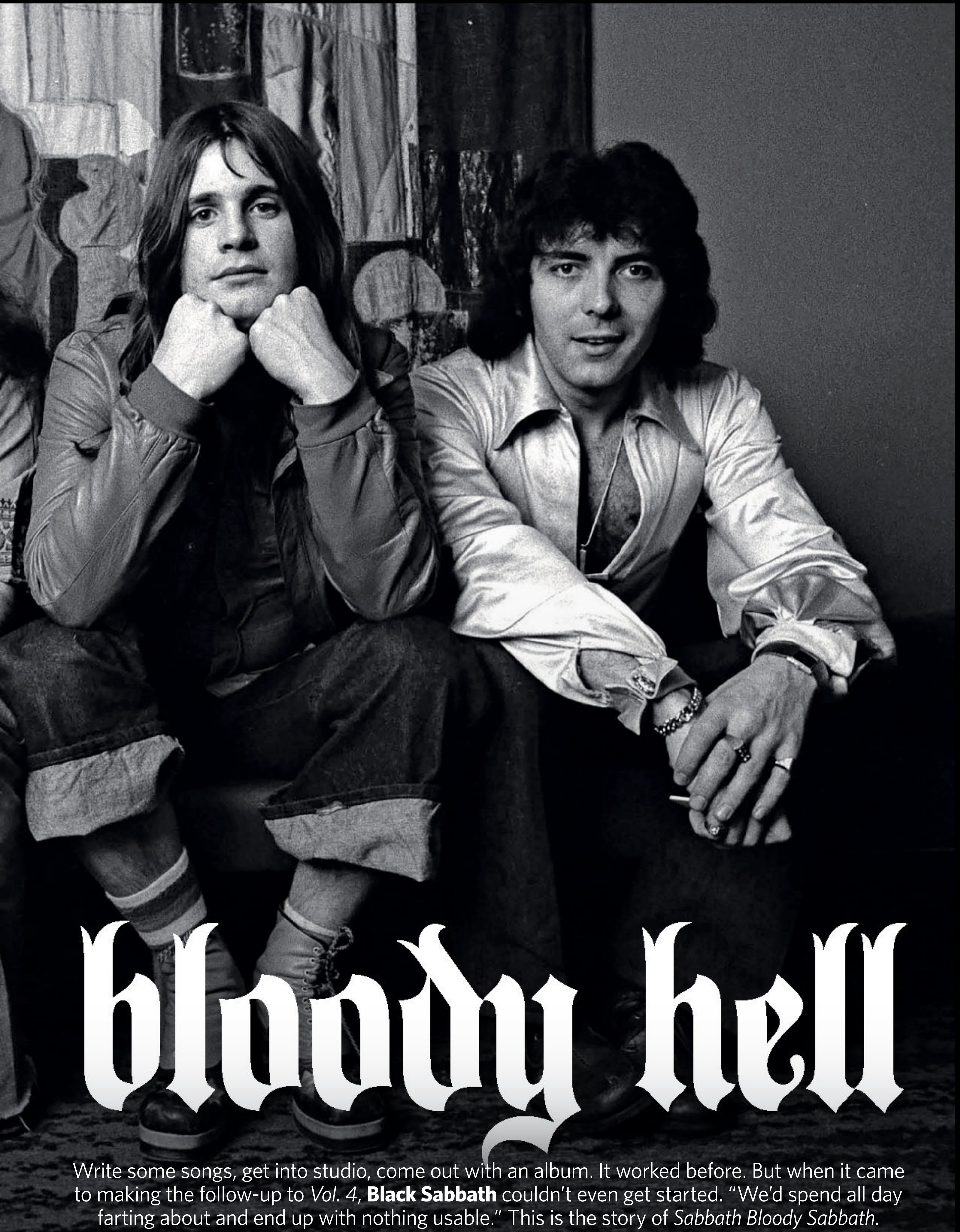
In a past life she worked as a clown.
Aged 16 Arielle graduated high school and moved to Los Angeles to study at the Musicians Institute. To pay her bills she took a slew of jobs including dog-walking and shifts in a pizza kitchen. One day she answered a Craigslist ad, which led to a lucrative period entertaining Bar Mitzvahs and making balloon animals. "It's great because I'm short, I'm five foot one, and a lot of the costumes like Elmo and Dora The Explorer are for small people. It's thirty degrees and you're in this disgusting thing… it was really funny."

Her friends include rock A-listers.
Arielle's first rock gig was in a Dio covers band, in California, opening for Sammy Hagar and Nightranger. Famously she befriended Brian May at a book-signing, going on to perform in *We Will Rock You* and enjoy a lasting kinship with him. She's still on friendly terms with collaborators like Eric Johnson and Vince Gill, but May has a special place in her life. "I grew up with Brian. I'm friends with his kids. And because I didn't have a father figure around that time, he kind of became that to me. Most of what we talk about is typically animals or mental health stuff, he's very open about his struggles with depression and just being human."

By the age of 21 she'd seen the dark sides of show business.
Relations with her record label had begun to sour. A personal trainer was hired, who put her on metabolism-boosting hormones, leaving her battling anorexia in rehab. Broke and suicidal, she wound up living in her car. Legal battles over her music ensued, which escalated to the Supreme Court level. She came out a free musician, albeit robbed of the masters to her pre-2015 catalogue. "My attorney said, 'are you sure you want to do this? Because this will give you the freedom to do what you want with your career, but at a cost.'"

Now she's doing things on her terms.
Since cutting ties with her label, Arielle has operated in a proudly DIY fashion. It hasn't always been easy but the quality of *'73* proves that musically it's worked out for the best. "I still struggle," she admits of the shadow cast by the experience. "It used to be something that was very shameful for me. I used to be so depressed, as recently as last year; I didn't want to get out of bed." Getting her dog, she says, has been a big help: "I think having something to take care of really helped; it took me outside of myself."

'73 is out now. Learn more at imarielle.com

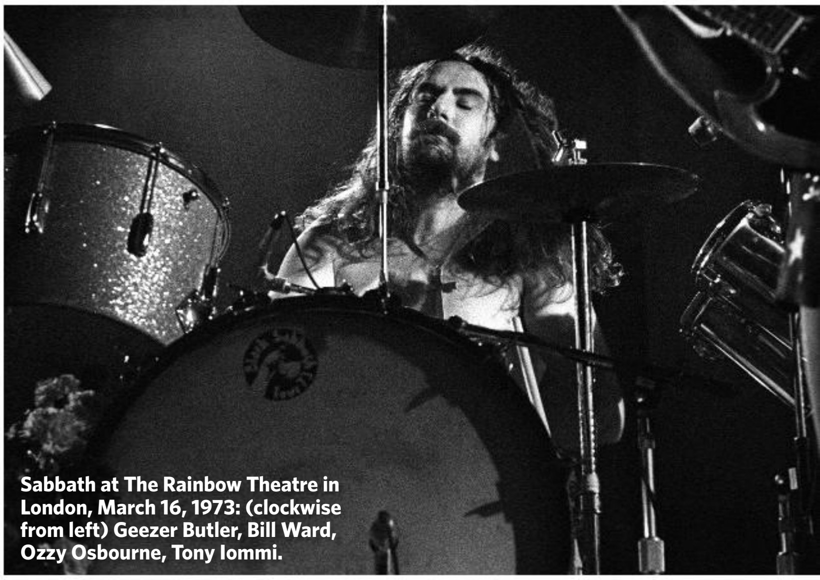


bloody hell

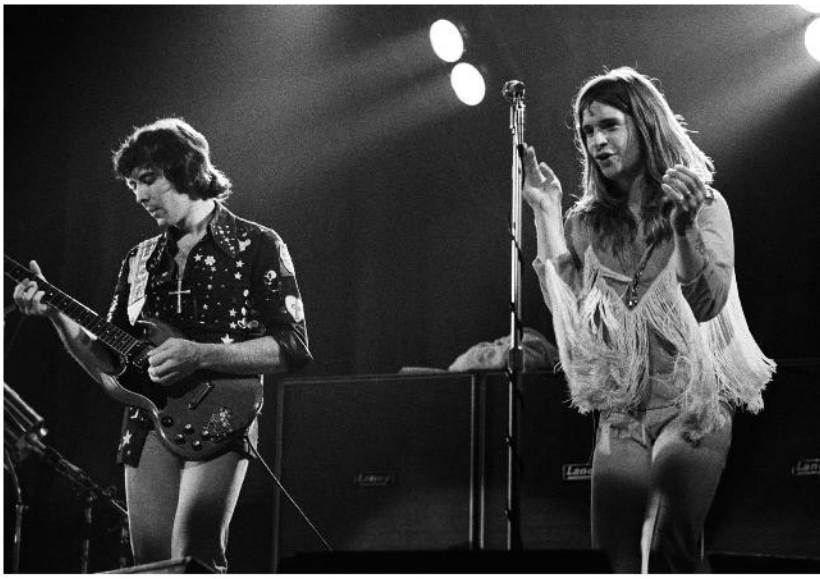
Write some songs, get into studio, come out with an album. It worked before. But when it came to making the follow-up to *Vol. 4*, **Black Sabbath** couldn't even get started. "We'd spend all day farting about and end up with nothing usable." This is the story of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*.

Words: **Mick Wall**

PHOTO: PETER MAZEL / AVALON



Sabbath at The Rainbow Theatre in London, March 16, 1973: (clockwise from left) Geezer Butler, Bill Ward, Ozzy Osbourne, Tony Iommi.



March 17, 1973. Black Sabbath play The Rainbow Theatre in London's Finsbury Park. It's the twenty-fourth of 25 shows across Britain and Europe that they have completed in a 32-day period. Everyone is exhausted, propped up on speed, coke, dope, acid – anything they can get their hands on to keep going. It's the band's second of two shows at The Rainbow, their last night in London, and there will be a big party afterwards. The following day they will lie comatose, flopped across the tiny seats of a small propeller plane as it bundles them north to Newcastle for the tour's final show, at the City Hall.

Right now, though, Ozzy Osbourne, Sabbath's 24-year-old officially 'loony' singer, knows only the Rainbow spotlight and what it's doing to his head. Grabbing onto the mic stand with both hands, to stop himself from falling, he yells into the darkness: "Are you high?" The audience, almost exclusively male, greatcoated and long-haired, respond with a muted: "Yeaahhh…"

Ozzy tries again. "I said *are you high*?"

Same response, only a little louder this time.

Ozzy stares at them forlornly. "*Are you high*?!" he screams at the top of his voice.

This time the place erupts.

"Good!" he tells them. "Cos so am I!"

Tony Iommi swipes at his guitar, and the ugly, tormented riff to *Snowblind* detonates, bassist Geezer Butler and drummer and Bill Ward thrumming as the building shudders. This is what it's all about in 1973, man. Not all that glam stuff you see on TV, but the fully loaded realisation of what rock music has become: hard, vicious, undeniable. And completely critic-proof.

"It was a whole new era for us. We felt really open on that album. It was a great atmosphere, good time."

Geezer Butler

What no one knows is that a few days after the Rainbow show there'll be a phone call that quietly cancels what should have been Sabbath's next US tour. Promoters will be furious. But eight months on the road has nearly killed them. Now all Iommi wants is to get back into the studio and produce the masterpiece that will, finally, he is determined, prove that Black Sabbath are as important, as worthy of serious consideration, as the bands they have been outselling, like the Stones and Deep Purple; like anyone you would care to name, with the sole exception of Led Zeppelin, who are now outselling everybody.

The other members of Sabbath want it too, but not nearly as much as Iommi does. The others still feel more comfortable sitting at the back of the class, sneering at teacher. Not Iommi. He wants Sabbath to carve out their own hallowed place in the pantheon, and for the name Tony Iommi to be up there, where he feels it belongs, alongside those of Jimmy Page and Ritchie Blackmore, Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton.

As he complained in an *NME* interview that year: "On drawing power and album sales we can compare with groups like Zeppelin and The Who, although we seldom get recognition for the fact." He wasn't just a heavy rock guitarist, he complained. "I've got a few tapes of Deep Purple in the car, but I prefer to listen to things like Peter Paul And Mary, Sinatra, the Moody Blues and The Carpenters."

He was an artist. People didn't understand. "I want to move to a bigger house," he said. To get away from everybody so he could work undisturbed, the Phantom Of The Rock Opera.

"I have a big house with a swimming pool now,

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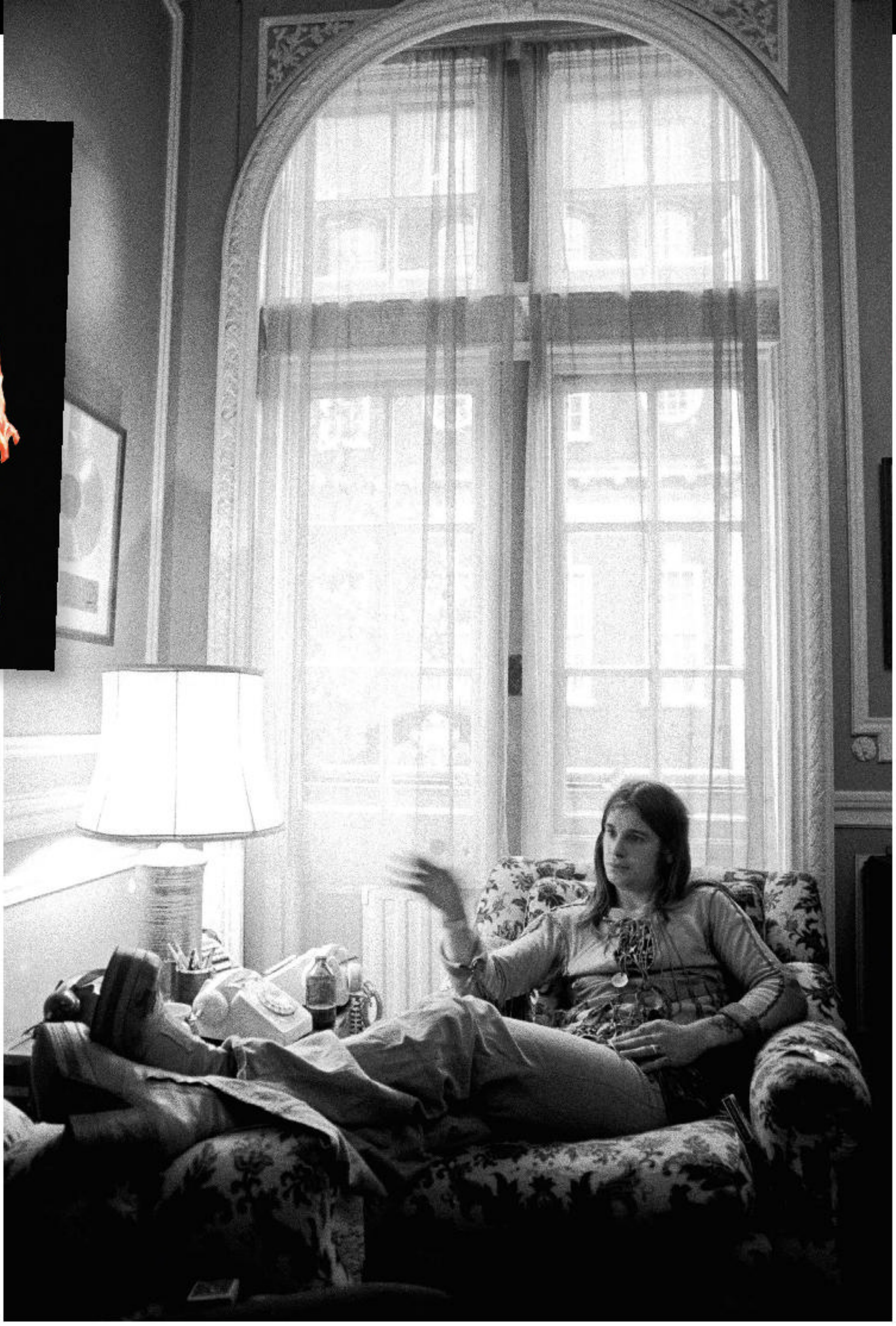

but I want one with tennis courts and a studio, so I have everything in the house and don't have to go out at all…"

Iommi had recently fallen for Susan Snowdon, a "posh bird" introduced to him by Sabbath's manager. Snowdon said she was a singer; Iommi offered to write for her. However, as he recounted in his 2011 memoir *Iron Man*: "She came up to my house one day and it was a bit awkward. I found out she couldn't sing – and she found out I hadn't written a song for her. But we did go out to dinner, and that's how it all started."

They were worlds apart, opposites that attracted. But it was clear from the day they got married in November 1973 that they were destined to remain strangers throughout the seven years they would be together.

Susan's wealthy father invited the newlyweds to move into his 200-room mansion on several hundred acres of grounds halfway between Birmingham and London. Iommi finally had his house with 'everything' and didn't have to go out again – ever.

Between tours, while the rest of the band took their wives and girlfriends on long holidays, Iommi stayed behind to work alone in his new home studio, snorting coke and 'creating' long into the night.

Iommi craved the one thing money couldn't buy: respect. Sabbath had been going to release a double live album, à la Deep Purple, whose double live *Made In Japan*, released in December '72, was now a colossal international hit. Plus a live album cost relatively nothing to make, an idea that particularly excited everyone.

But when Iommi listened back to the tapes, he was aghast. This was primeval Sabbath, heavy as hobnailed boots trudging through mud, obnoxiously loud and overbearing. Exciting for the audiences that were there for the shows, perhaps, but utterly enervating on record, as draining as a coke comedown. And as a signifier of where Iommi wanted Sabbath to go, completely off-message. He binned the idea.

And so it was that in the summer of 1973 Sabbath found themselves back in Los Angeles, working on their fifth album.

Because it was just easier, they retreated to the same Bel Air mansion where they'd conceived their previous album, *Vol.4*, and immediately called the same drug dealers and groupies that had made their time there the year before so 'inspiring'.

But while the rest of the band thought they were making what would effectively be *Vol. 5*, Iommi had bigger ideas. Unlike previous Sabbath albums, most of which had been recorded on the run, between tours, this time things would be markedly different, he decided. Instead of simply conjuring a mood and going with it as they might a live jam, they would step back and take time to consider what they had and how they could improve it, and worry later about how they would or wouldn't be able to reproduce the new material live. Build something up-to-the-minute that the fans and the critics could begin a whole new conversation about; alter perceptions so that Black Sabbath no longer laboured under the imprimatur of a loud, clanking heavy rock band, but were something more exhilarating and nimbler on its feet. Something where the music really did come first, where it could be allowed to rehabilitate itself into something more in line with new headline makers like Yes, whose daring 1973 double album *Tales From Topographic Oceans* would ostensibly have just one track per side of vinyl, and Pink Floyd, who with the release that same year of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* had left behind their earlier image as psychedelic prophets to metamorphose into progressive rock goliaths. Concept albums were now de rigeur for the rock artist looking to be taken seriously. Iommi listened to The Who's 1973 double album *Quadrophenia*, read the liquorice reviews, and felt that Sabbath were being left to die by the side of the road. ▷

"Someone would come in with another ounce of fking powder, and you'd be up there talking bullshit for three weeks."**

Ozzy Osbourne

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There were also commercial pressures to consider. For all their understandable satisfaction with the way *Vol. 4* turned out – the first Sabbath album not to be made under the gun of budgetary restrictions – it had essentially been more of the same, but with a more polished production sheen. And although it had gone gold in America, *Vol. 4* had reached only No.13 in the chart, lower than either *Paranoid* or *Master Of Reality*. It was the same story at home in Britain, where it stalled at No.8.

Suddenly, Sabbath's previously skyward sales trajectory had tapered off. They still sold tickets for shows, but their fan base had given a clear indication that it already had enough Sabbath albums to be going on with and maybe didn't need any more.

The perception was that unlike The Who or Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath had stood still musically. With their heads buried in booze and coke, Ozzy, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward might not have noticed it, but in the summer of 1973, as Iommi struggled to come up with what he knew had to be genuinely new and startling music, he was painfully aware that it was now or never for Black Sabbath.

Buoyed by the full repertoire of rock'n'roll remedies, Iommi immersed himself in non-stop 36-hour shifts at the Record Plant. As he told me: "It became a ritual. Every time we'd do an album, we'd get a load of dope and then some coke, and off we'd go. We'd be there all bloody night writing stuff, and I never used to want to leave the studio."

This time, though, the old tricks simply weren't working.

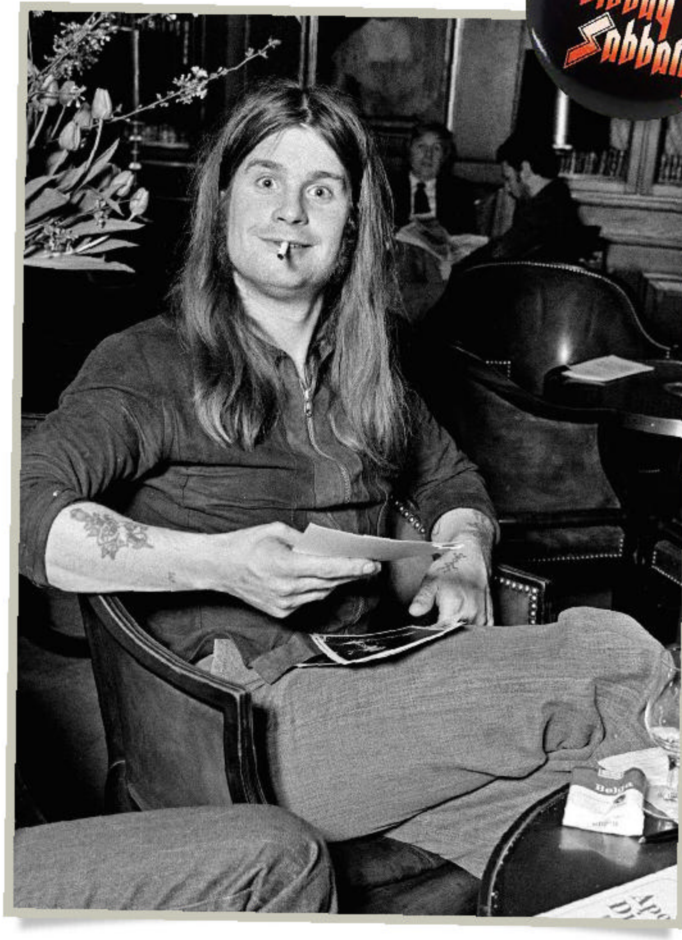
"We thought we'd go back to LA," he said. "Do everything the same – the house, studio… everything exactly the same. But nothing happened. We just dried up. It all just fell to pieces for us."

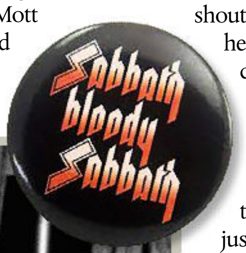
He began to get furious with the others, then desperate with himself. One day, he walked into a hairdresser on Hollywood Boulevard and ordered them to cut his hair – short. When he got back to the Bel Air mansion, he also shaved off his moustache. Iommi became unrecognisable to his own band – even to himself. Yet still things would not fall into the place in the studio. Finally, in June, he threw in the towel and ordered the band back to England – in order to try to re-establish some sense of normality – before starting again.

Ironically, the place Sabbath chose to regroup was even weirder than the demented atmosphere they had fled from in LA. Clearwell Castle, an 18th-century neo-Gothic pile in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, had been built for the Member of Parliament Thomas Wyndham in 1728 to replace an older house that had occupied the same site. Constructed of local stone with battlements, and an ornate gateway formed by two huge towers, it had been restored to former glories in the 1950s by the son of the former estate under-gardener, Frank Yeates.

When Yeates died in 1973, he left behind within the castle a newly built rehearsal room and basement recording studio. Having noted the burgeoning number of large countryside properties now being occupied – at no little cost – by the new generation of album-oriented rock sophisticates, Yeates had shrewdly decided to get in on the act, and for the rest of the decade the dark, atmospheric basement of Clearwell Castle would be temporary home for a number of high-profile rock acts recording there, including Mott The Hoople, Bad Company, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin.

The first band to rent and move into the property for such purposes – somewhat fittingly, given the subterranean aspect of the facilities – was Black Sabbath.





"*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was our final record. Then it started to drift around all over the place."

Ozzy Osbourne

What they did not discover until they were actually sleeping there was that the castle was reputedly haunted by a mischievous female ghost whose modus operandi was apparently entering locked rooms and leaving them in a mess, as though a strong wind had blown in through the windows. She was also said to sing lullabies to her ghost child on the landing at night while playing a tinkling musical box. The band were not told any of this, lest it should freak them out. But they certainly felt the vibes.

The first few days they were there, rehearsing new material in the former dungeons, they all saw a shadowy figure in a long black cloak hurry past the door. Wary from so many previous experiences of black-robed Sabbath fans making their unwelcome presence felt, Iommi stopped playing and, with a roadie, ran after the rapidly retreating figure.

"They saw him go into this other door at the end of the corridor," Butler recalled. "They were shouting at him, because they thought he was some lunatic that got into the castle. They went into the room where he had gone into and there was nobody in there."

When they asked if any other visitors were staying at the castle, the owner told them: "Oh, that's just a ghost." The castle was full of ghosts, he shrugged. The band stood and stared. Everyone was doing so much coke, it felt like they already had a million ghosts inside their heads. Iommi had lately become more and more convinced of his own growing occult powers.

"The whole group communicates on a very close level," he informed one interviewer solemnly. "Like, we have what you could almost call a third eye. We can sense with each other what is going to happen. We've had actual experiences. One I remember, Geezer was asleep, and he must have astral travelled. I was stuck in the lift. He dreamt this. When I woke him up, he said: 'I'm glad it's you, cos I just dreamt you were stuck in the lift.' These are quite regular occurrences. They used to frighten me at first, till I got used to it."

Continually coked up, strung out on paranoia and bad dreams about ghosts and castles, assaulted by Iommi's manic perfectionism, resulted in hours of lost time. "We'd spend all day farting about and end up with nothing usable," Iommi glowered.

In desperation to meet Iommi's demands for something – anything – new to add to the Sabbath gene pool, the band tried everything to find different sounds and textures. And, gradually, things did begin to happen.

"We'd end up coming up with all these brilliant ideas," said Iommi. "Like trying things going off the piano, into the piano and then mic-ing up the piano strings to hear different sounds."

At one point, Bill Ward took an anvil he'd found while poking around the castle's outhouses and recorded himself dropping it into a barrel of water. Iommi brought in unusual instruments that he felt went well with the castle's permanent-midnight ambience: river-deep guitars, old-school orchestration (name-checked almost apologetically on the album sleeve as The Phantom Fiddlers), even bagpipes for what would become the album's big sign-off epic, its very own *Stairway To Heaven* grand finale, the monumental *Spiral Architect*. Butler's final message was ▷

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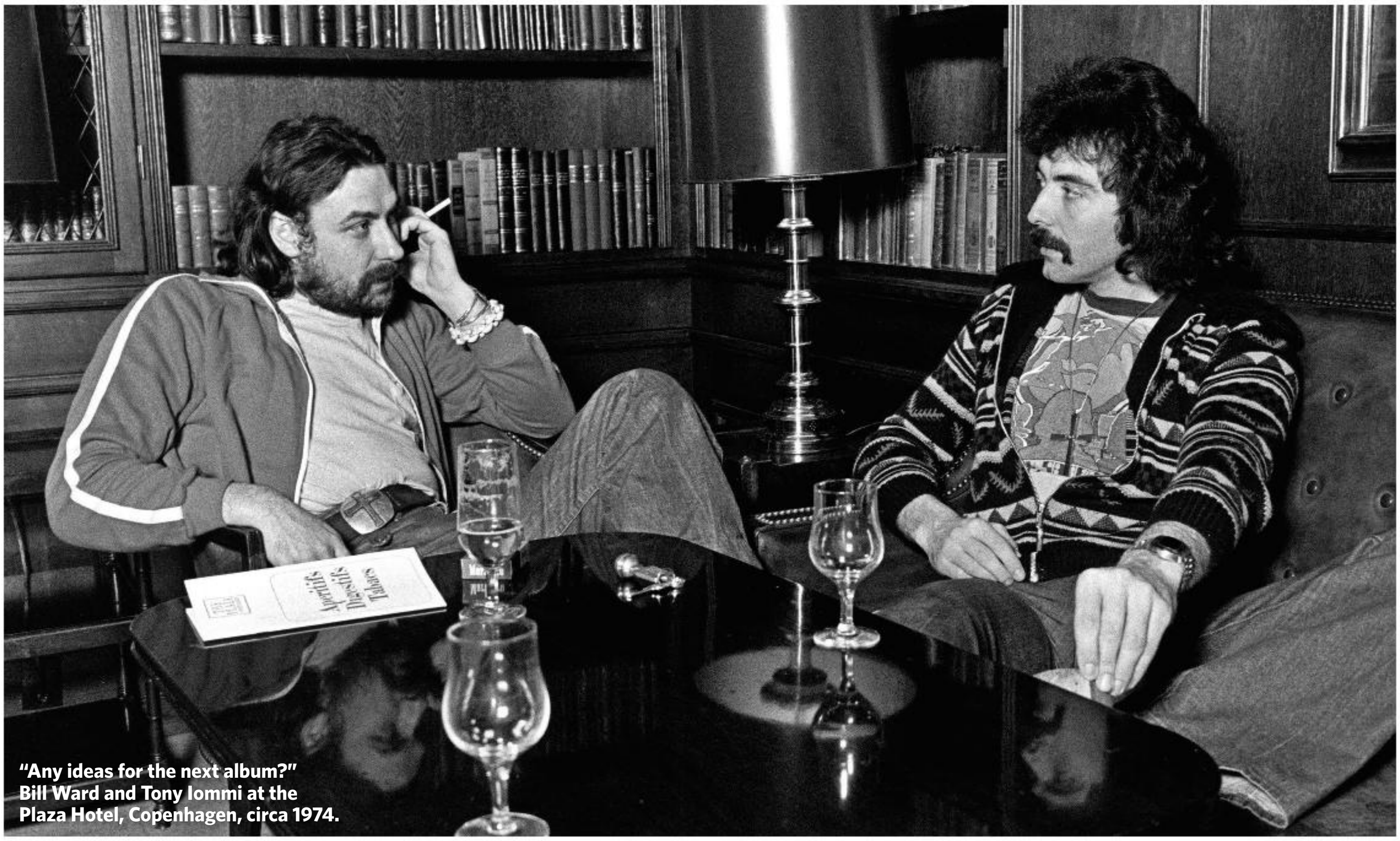
Black Sabbath: (l-r) Bill Ward, Ozzy Osbourne, Geezer Butler, Tony Iommi.

PETER MAZEL / AVALON



"Any ideas for the next album?" Bill Ward and Tony Iommi at the Plaza Hotel, Copenhagen, circa 1974.

"We thought we'd go back to LA, do everything the same... But we just dried up. It all just fell to pieces for us."

Tony Iommi on working on *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*

reassuringly universal: *'I look upon my earth and feel the warmth and know that it's good…'* The tacked-on sound of applause at the end added an extra level of funhouse grandiosity.

For all the intensity, there would be a lightness of touch to the new material too. With Iommi in full control of proceedings now, the Sabbath sound became less about thuggish riffing and brutal rhythms, and far more about a newly mellifluent style that could embroider even woolly-mammoth riffs like *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath,* the heavyweight title track, its unexpected sideways contortions, jazz-like, awash with zinging electric and acoustic guitars and Butler's pulsing new fuzz bass: an instant classic to go with *War Pigs* and *Iron Man*.

Next track, *A National Acrobat,* twists the sound into more recognisably malevolent Sabbath territory, yet even then the shift is all space and time, with Iommi leading the band into a whole new sonic galaxy.

The band were also having greater fun with lyrics. Ozzy singing *'When worlds collide, I'm trapped inside, my embryonic cell'* might sound like it's from Butler's HG Wells-obsessed vocabulary, but in fact, he told me, *A National Acrobat* "is about wanking. Not that anybody got it." That is, a song about wanking "told from the sperms' point of view".

The only droopy moment was the now seemingly obligatory acoustic instrumental, titled *Fluff* – named after Alan 'Fluff' Freeman, Radio 1's voice of rock in the 70s, whose Saturday afternoon show was famous for the listeners' letters that always seemed to begin: "Dear Fluff, more Sabbs, more ELP…"

The novelty of such interludes had long-since worn off. Iommi was insistent, however, that the band continue with them, as part of his attempt to demonstrate how much more there was to Sabbath than blunt-force trauma-metal.

Precious metal: Black Sabbath in 1973 with gold discs for *Vol.4*.

The rest of the new material, though, found Sabbath touching new heights: *Sabbra Cadabra* was pure, bounding rock'n'roll, its *'Lovely lady make love all night long'* lyrics made-up on the spot by Ozzy, based on the preposterous voice-overs on some of the German porn films he'd been watching. Butler cohered them into lyrics, and Yes keyboard player Rick Wakeman was brought in to add some honky-tonk piano and cathedral-like synthesiser. The vocals and guitar were run through a processor that gave them a futuristic sheen.

Wakeman, said Iommi, "was wild back then". Certainly too wild for Yes, who had opened for Sabbath in the US some years before. "Rick used to travel with us, and not Yes, for some reason," Iommi said with a chuckle. When the beer-and-curry quaffing Wakeman left the brown rice-eating Yes later the same year, there was some discussion about bringing him into the Sabbath fold full time. But Wakeman had had enough of the band-on-the-run lifestyle. When months later he had the first of what would eventually be three heart attacks, his decision not to join Sabbath just as they were reaching the low-water mark of their own 'personal issues' seemed prudent. ▷

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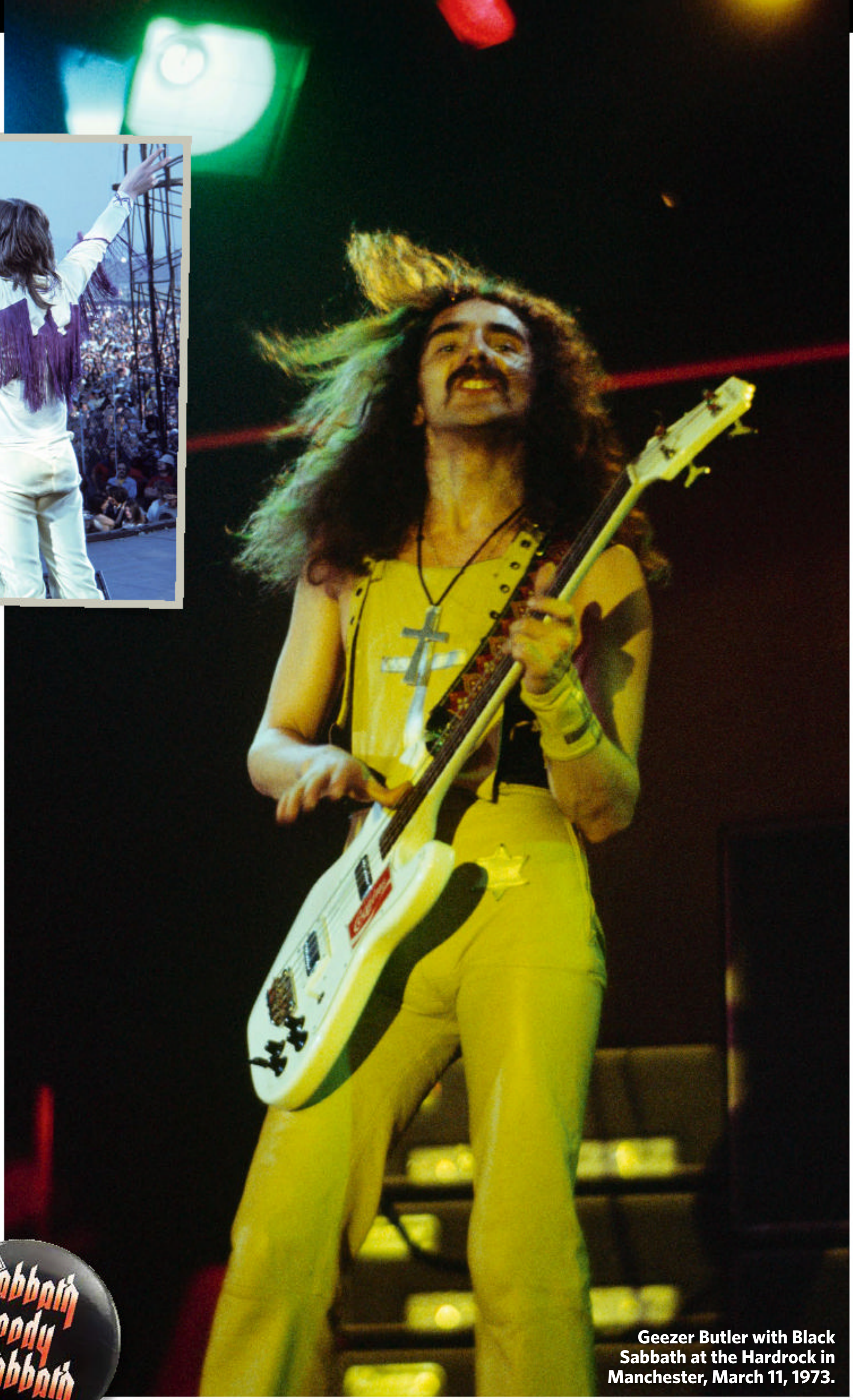
PAUL CANTY / AVALON

Ozzy salutes the crowd at the California Jam on April 6, 1974.



Geezer Butler with Black Sabbath at the Hardrock in Manchester, March 11, 1973.

The four tracks on side two of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* were similarly inspired, similarly lyrically playful, similarly unhinged. On *Killing Yourself To Live* they gave a glimpse into the fear and loathing behind the scenes, its crunching bass and groove-laden drums over a bed of synthesised vocals and guitar lending it an air of authentic melodrama, Ozzy issuing his entreaty over the lost-in-space bridge: '*Smoke it… Get high!*' It's the same feeling on *Looking For Today*, with the days of meat-hook riffs firmly in the past as the band build on a galloping

"We weren't getting on very well. Then Tony came up with the riff for *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*…"

Geezer Butler

new buzz that is so streamlined and catchy it could have come from Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* album. The classic Sabbath air of cobwebbed mystery had not been lost, just refurbished for the mid-70s. On *Who Are You* the piercing synthesisers summon an atmosphere of insomniacal mania as Ozzy pleads: '*Please I beg you tell me, in the name of hell, who are you?*' before the ascending *Bolero* piano brings the whole deranged monstrosity full-circle.

As Butler said: "It was a whole new era for us. We felt really open on that album. It was a great atmosphere, good time, great coke!" It was, he said more seriously, "like Part Two of your life… Right before that we were in a terrible slump. We were all exhausted from touring. We weren't getting on very well. Then Tony came up with the riff for *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* and everybody sparked to life."

It looked like a new dawn. But it was all an illusion. As Ozzy later said: "*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was our final record. Then it started to drift around all over the place. See, our idea of making a good record was to run and find some new location. We thought, if you travel somewhere new, it's kind of like a new adventure. So you'd get there and for the first few days you'd jam about a bit, and then you'd be back to your old ways. You'd be locked in your own heads. Someone would come in with another ounce of fucking powder and you'd be up there talking bullshit for three weeks, you know?"

The distress signals were already flashing red by the time *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was released in Britain on December 3, 1973. It became Sabbath's biggest-charting album since *Paranoid* three years before, eventually plateauing at No.4. In the US, where it was released a month later, it also reversed the downward chart trend, and reached No.11.

What it didn't do, for Tony Iommi, anyway, was quash the doubters and naysayers that still wanted to make it their mission to trounce everything Sabbath did. Iommi was delighted, however, to finally read something good about one of their albums in *Rolling Stone*.

In his review of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, Gordon Fletcher wrote in that magazine: "Black Sabbath's major contribution has been to successfully capture the gist of specifically seventies culture through their music. They relate to this impersonal, mechanical decade much as Delta bluesmen and their Chicago spin-offs related to their eras – by synthesizing collective feelings and giving their contemporaries hope by revealing the disaffection that unites all of them. In that remote but real sense, Black Sabbath might well be considered true Seventies bluesmen."

Well that was a load of pretentious old bollocks, of course. They knew that. But Black Sabbath were at least getting the kind of heavyweight critical respect Tony Iommi felt was their due, their right, the guitarist locked away in his hotel suite, working his way through another ounce of coke, bloodthirsting for revenge.

It was the end of the beginning.

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THE
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INTERVIEW

ANDY SUMMERS

The unfeasibly young-looking 80-year-old talks about conquering the world alongside "two total arseholes" in The Police, his 'apprenticeship' with Zoot Money and others, life after The Police, the reunion, his long-time passion for photography, and much more.

Interview: **Paul Rees**

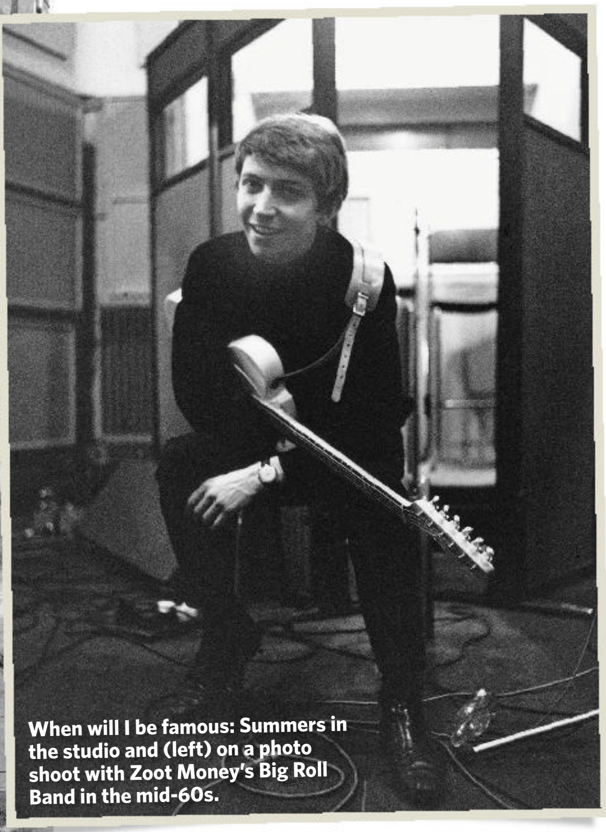
By his own judgement, Andy Summers does not like to be idle. Isn't suited to a life of leisure. The late-March morning when we talk is a case in point. Only just returned to his home in Los Angeles from playing a run of shows in Brazil with his Police tribute band Call The Police, he was up early editing the file of photographs he took on the trip. Photography is Summers's other great passion, seriously so. His black-and-white portraits are handsome and enigmatic. Rumpled hotel rooms and nocturnal ephemera are a speciality, the locations the exotic preserve of the globe-trotting rock superstar.

Now a spry 80-year-old, Summers has been famous for six decades as one third of The Police alongside Sting and Stewart Copeland. The band have sold 80 million records and counting, their run of hits beginning with *Roxanne* in April 1979. They've broken up twice, in 1985 and then again in 2008, rancorously on both occasions. Ten years older than both of his erstwhile bandmates, Summers was well-established as a guitarist before The Police and has continued to plough his own furrow apart from the band.

Born in the Lancashire market town of Poulton-le-Fylde on New Year's Eve, 1942, he grew up in Bournemouth, and took piano lessons before picking up the guitar. At 19 he relocated to London with his friend Zoot Money. Operating as Zoot Money's Big Roll Band, they gained a foothold on the capital's then blossoming R&B club scene. By London's Summer of Love in 1967, he and Money were garbed in white robes and kaftans and playing psychedelic rock with the short-lived Dantalian's Chariot. Afterwards, Summers passed through the line-ups of Soft Machine and Eric Burdon And The Animals, before moving to LA for five years, where he studied classical guitar and composition at California State University.

Returning to London in 1972, he soon established himself as a regular on the session circuit. On October 26, 1975, he filled in for Mike Oldfield to perform *Tubular Bells* with the Northern Concert Orchestra at Newcastle City Hall. Opening the show that night was local band Last Exit, whose singer and bassist was Sting. Eighteen months later, Summers joined ex-Gong bassist Mike Howlett's Strontium 90, which also included Sting and Curved Air's American former drummer ▷

MAIN: © COPYRIGHT MO SUMMERS; INSET: GETTY



When will I be famous: Summers in the studio and (left) on a photo shoot with Zoot Money's Big Roll Band in the mid-60s.

Stewart Copeland. Sting and Copeland, along with Corsican guitarist Henry Padovani, were already operating as The Police, and invited Summers to join. After a very brief spell as a four-piece, Summers supplanted the barely competent Padovani in The Police and within six years they were the biggest band in the world.

Tomorrow Summers flies to London, where he will open his latest photography show, Harmonics Of The Night/A Series Of Glances, at the Leica Gallery in Mayfair. Previously he has exhibited in the US, Japan, Australia, Canada, France and Spain. He has a tie-in book being published, too, also titled *A Series Of Glances*.

He answers the phone sounding interrupted, somewhat grumpy, but he warms up talking about his photography. "'Passion' is actually the wrong word for it," he says. "And it's not a mere hobby, but a whole other part of my life."

"I got given a Telecaster, and that turned everything around for me."

When did you start taking photographs seriously?
In 1979, when I was relentlessly on tour with The Police. We were surrounded by photographers all the time. Pretty much all of them women. I started to get interested in their cameras and gear. It was all very groovy and hip. They'd all turn up dressed in black, shouting instructions. I started when we arrived in New York. It gave me something to do.

Even at that point, I told myself: "I'm going to get good at this." I had no idea I'd any talent for it, but I became quite fanatical. It's like playing music, you get better at it if you do it a lot and if you study. I was very lucky, I was in New York a great deal and I became friends with probably the world's greatest photographer, Ralph Gibson. He mentored me, and because of my friendship with him I got very deep into the inner circle of photography at the time.

In many of your photographs there's a sense of melancholy and loneliness, particularly in those of hotel rooms. Is that the lot of the touring musician?
Well, yes. Also, I don't want to take funny photographs. It must be something that either catches me in a formal, photographic way, or in an emotional way. You can get shitty pictures of hotel rooms, or you can make them a bit more artful. The subject matter in a way is secondary to one's visual sense. You can make the seemingly more ordinary appear interesting. I suppose you could say I have an eye for it.

Tell me about an arresting photograph of yours titled *Man Horse*. The two subjects of the title are almost up to their necks in the ocean, together but facing in opposite directions. As if posed in the surf. What was going on there?
That's a favourite of mine. It was a great moment. One's mind was prepared. Me, Stewart and Sting were fudging around the edge of the island of Montserrat. We had gone out on a little picnic. The only way you could get around to the spot we'd chosen was by boat. As we arrived at the beach, I spotted that guy leading his horse into the ocean. I immediately saw there was something extraordinary there, a picture. I leapt over the side of the boat, up to my chin in water too, and took a few shots of the guy and his horse. There must be some sort of hook for a photograph to come off, like a song.

What images from your childhood come to you most vividly?
I grew up in the English countryside. So they would be typical of the time: playing in the woods and wearing cowboy outfits, hiding in trees and all that kind of normal stuff. England was somewhat more rural and wilder then. I grew up by a beautiful river and a mill house. I spent my childhood out in nature. A real nature boy.

Can you recall the first piece of music that struck you, and why?
It would be something like *Wonderful Copenhagen*. I saw the film it was taken from with Danny Kaye [*Hans Christian Andersen*, 1952]. It's a very melodic, lovely, upbeat piece. I learnt to play it on the piano. I played a lot of music as a kid. Piano and then guitar. I had piano lessons at the insistence of my mother. I guess I was a natural musician. It's a gift. You're born with it. You can learn art forms, but there's an inherent aspect you must have. I tried being a painter for a few years. I finally stopped after five or six years because I realised it wasn't

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Summers's photo *Man Horse*, one of his favourites, which he took in Montserrat.

natural to me. I could sort of create a good painting with oils, but I hadn't got the 'thing' born into my hands. Same with music. You can learn and get pretty good at it, but you're never going to be better than the person who has it naturally.

When was the first time you played music in front of an audience?
I was eleven or twelve, singing and playing on guitar an old folk song called *Tom Dooley* in front of the whole school. That was when the bug bit, as a boy, and it's never left me. If you were a kid with a guitar and you got up on stage, you were an attraction. The string of girls grew hugely at that point. I quickly grasped that part of it as well.

As a teenager, you started to play around Bournemouth with Zoot Money, and then the two of you went off together to London. What did you think of London in 1962?
It was an incredibly scary place. Zoot and me had a thing and it was me who prompted the move. I said to him: "We have to go to London." We didn't know how we were going to survive. We didn't know anything. Somehow we got ourselves a basement flat in West Kensington. Then we got our drummer up from Bournemouth, and were put in touch with a second guy, Paul Williams. Paul didn't play an instrument, but we needed a bass player and he offered. He'd never even picked a bass up, but he was another natural musician. It was very risky stuff, because we didn't have a gig at all.

We managed to land an audition at a place called the Flamingo Club in Soho for a guy named Rick Gunnell. He offered us a gig as the new house band. We were good. Zoot was a great singer. From there we started playing all over the country. We still weren't even out of our teens. The Flamingo Club was very dodgy. It was a late-night place, the audience mostly criminals. Prostitutes, drug dealers, the Kray twins. Boy, talk about being chucked into Dante's Inferno. We played six sets a night. An incredible training ground to a drunk, stoned, out-of-order crowd, packed to the brim. Eric Clapton also played there. John Mayall, Peter Green and Albert Lee, too. It was the nest we all came from.

From there you leapt into the head trip of Dantalian's Chariot.
The ridiculously named Dantalian's Chariot. It was the glorious sixties, and you wanted to be a part of all that. What can I tell you, there were a lot of drugs around in the scene.

"I was too educated for punk rock, too good for it. On another planet."

So we abandoned our great rhythm and blues band. I mean, it's a bit tragic when you think back on it, but that's life. Being young and making terrible mistakes. We started to play at places like Middle Earth, The Roundhouse. The acid era.

There was so much stuff opening to us in the moment. There were a lot of influences going on. We began to embrace world music. Ravi Shankar. The Beatles discovering Indian music. Miles Davis was playing a more modal sort of music. John Coltrane and Bill Evans were around. That was what was musically in the air. We moved away from Ray Charles and James Brown and into this droning kind of music. I got to play these long, psychedelic guitar solos. Not the twelve-bar blues, but something else altogether. It was the whole ethos of the period, and it suited me very much."

Going off to formally study music can't have been typical of the time?
I'd just had enough of the band thing. I'd done it for five years. I came to the US with Soft Machine, and then after I left them I was in The Animals. From being in West Kensington, I was suddenly living in Laurel Canyon with Eric Burdon. It was a totally different scene, very trippy. A head-turning experience. The thing with Eric came to an end and I came back to England. But I didn't like it. I went straight back out to California. Everything changed for me. I was in LA. I had an LA girlfriend. I was a very serious musician and I just wanted to get deeper into musical theory. I did that and I really enjoyed going to college.

This quest for self-improvement seems to have been a constant theme.
All the time. It's a lifetime of improvement. At college I played classical guitar, studied harmony. It was being submerged in the thing itself, not just trying to get your face out on stage. I'd had all of that already. All the ridiculous scenarios you go through, the sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. I studied and played guitar relentlessly, until the whole thing wore out and I had to come back to London once more. It was a fertile period. Like the cliché where you go out into the desert for forty days and come back renewed. I got given a Telecaster, too, and that turned the whole thing around for me again.

Summers and photographer Ralph Gibson at their exhibition Light Strings: Impressions Of The Guitar in 2004.

Back in London, you did sessions for a range of artists including Joan Armatrading, Jon Lord, David Essex and easy-listening ▷

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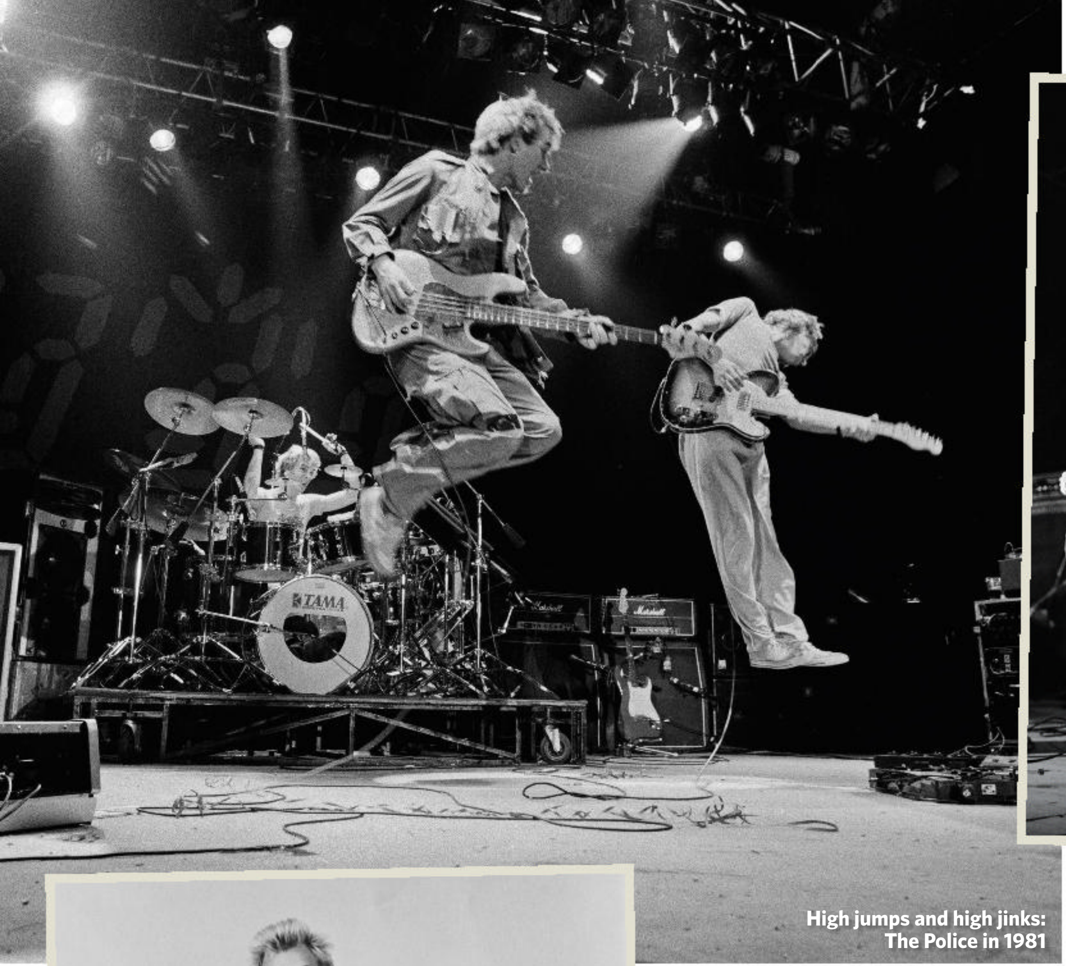
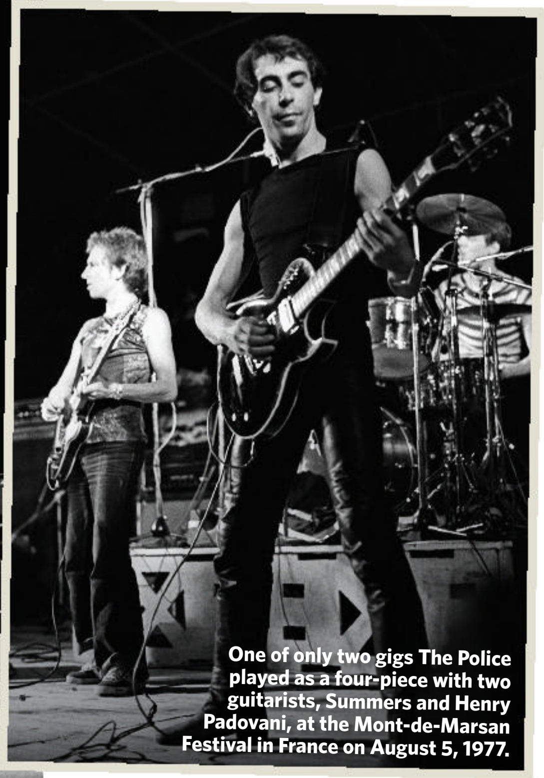


High jumps and high jinks: The Police in 1981



One of only two gigs The Police played as a four-piece with two guitarists, Summers and Henry Padovani, at the Mont-de-Marsan Festival in France on August 5, 1977.

star Neil Sedaka. What did those jobs mean to you at the time?
Nothing much besides survival. I was able to play pretty much anything with anybody by then, so that's what I did. Playing with Neil Sedaka was great fun, and it came to me exactly when I was in desperate need of money. It was a great offer. We did the Royal Festival Hall. Neil adored me and we got on very well. He's a great songwriter and an extremely good musician. He can play the shit out of the piano.

Summers joining The Police was a halting affair. He heard an early version of *Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic* at Mike Howlett's house. Howlett played it to him on a tape recorder in his bedroom. "I thought it was rubbish," Summers proclaims. "Henry Padovani could hardly play. By coincidence, I'd also met Stewart once before, up in Newcastle. I was doing a gig with Kevin Ayers, and he was there playing with Curved Air. We all ended up in the same hotel. Lying on the floor of one room, smoking and drinking beer and looking up at the ceiling. I remember thinking: 'Boy, that guy can talk.'"

"I was working with two total arseholes [in The Police]."

Despite his first impressions, Summers kept in touch with Sting after Strontium 90 dissolved. Eventually, Sting coerced him into The Police, initially as the band's second guitarist. They played only a couple of gigs as a four-piece, touting themselves as a punk band. "Stewart was very intent upon being punk," Summers says. "Henry seemed to fit that much more than I did. I was too educated for punk rock, too good for it. On another planet. Poor Henry got the boot, and I went into it full-time."

Copeland's elder brother, Miles, who soon progressed to being their manager, put up the £1,500 it cost them to make their debut album, *Outlandos d'Amour*. They recorded intermittently over a six-month period from January 1978, holed up at a poky studio in Leatherhead, Surrey, above a dairy.

A&M Records signed them on the strength of the song *Roxanne*, but initially at least, The Police were a slow burn. The album scarcely made a ripple upon its release in November 1978. It took six more months, and reissues of *Roxanne* and *Can't Stand Losing You*, for them to achieve lift-off.

How accurate did your first impressions of The Police prove to be?
I felt there was something there. Sting and Stewart were both pretty rough players. They were supposed to be a punk band, but they weren't really. They were playing with the attitude of punk, though, so it was very fast and a bit out of time. Not really all that good. But I kept going with it. The first time I thought "Hang on a minute…" was when Sting told me he'd got this new song he wanted to show me, which was *Visions Of The Night*. There was an edge to it, and I found it exciting. Not tired at all, full of energy.

Apparently Miles Copeland was afraid that your joining would damage The Police's punk cred.
He was dead wrong. Miles is full of it. There's a difference between attitude, and trying to be what's current, and real music. I saved the band's life. Basically, Sting came to life when I joined. All the songs started to come out. The natural ability he had could be released through me. It never would have happened with Henry.

At one early point, weren't you lined up to record with John Cale?
John was supposed to be the record producer. But he turned up and he was drunk out of his mind. Hopeless. It just didn't work out. I think he pissed off after about half an hour. Nothing came of it. Later I found myself on a TV show with John in Spain. On that occasion he rolled around on the floor and tried to stick an ▷

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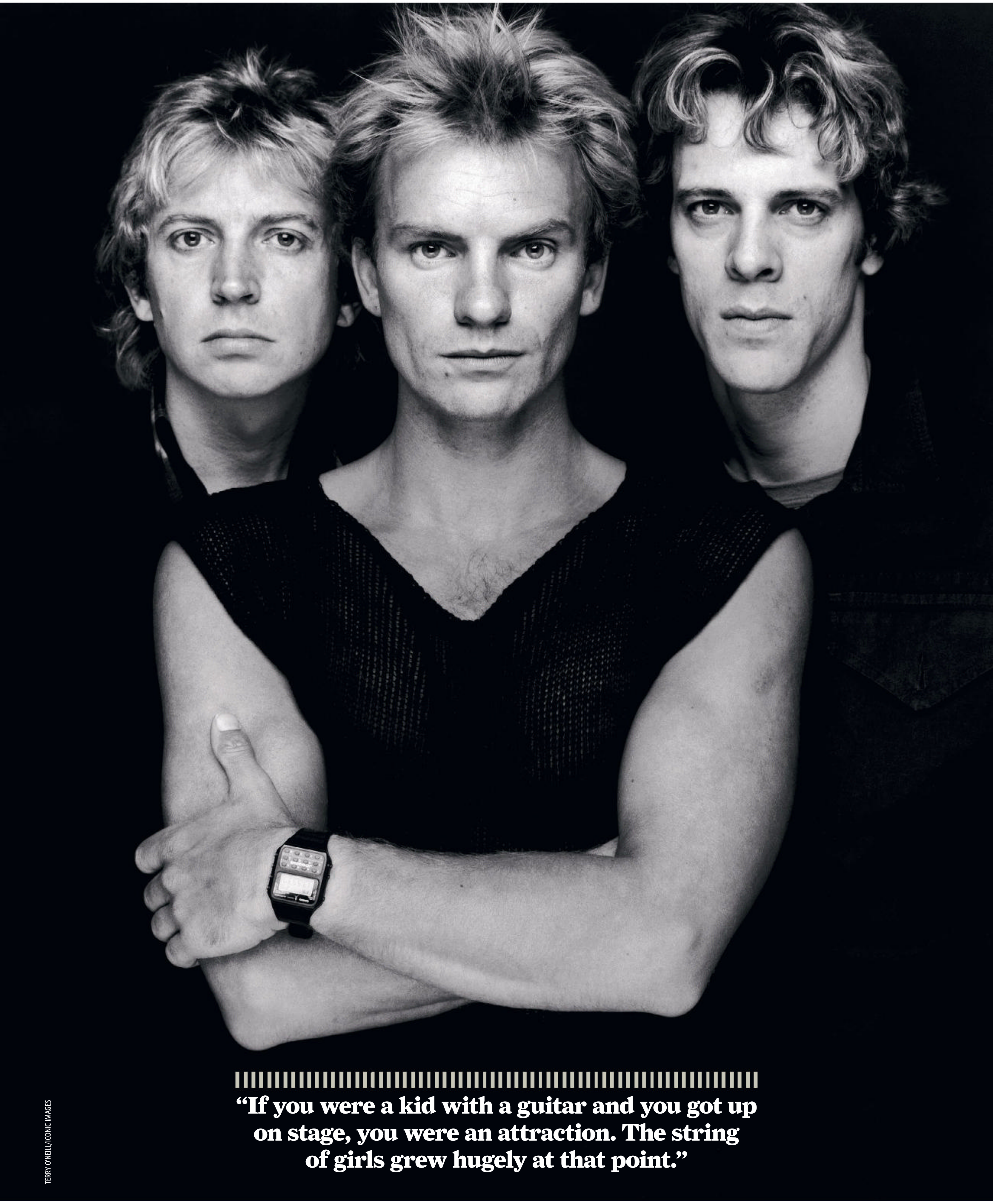
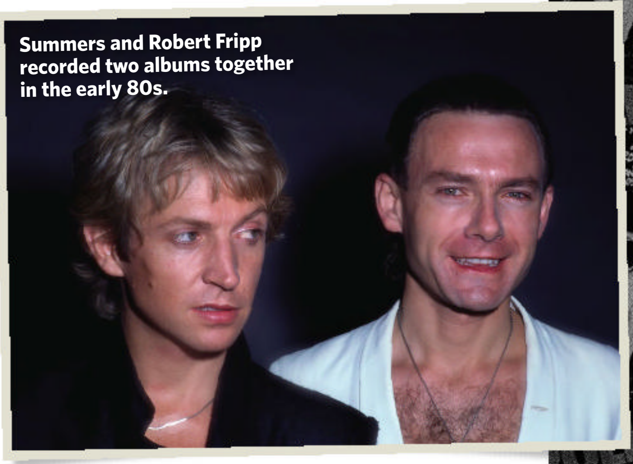


TERRY O'NEILL/ICONIC IMAGES

"If you were a kid with a guitar and you got up on stage, you were an attraction. The string of girls grew hugely at that point."



Summers and Robert Fripp recorded two albums together in the early 80s.

American Express card up his nose, because it had cocaine on it. Talented guy, but it all went a bit south for him.

In 1979 The Police undertook their breakthrough US tour cooped in a Ford transit van. What did you learn from being in such proximity to each other?
That I was working with two total arseholes. I struggled on. It's usually humour that saves the day. When you spend as much time as we did together, 24/7, and you're travelling hundreds of miles a day in a van, you develop a collective mind. It's very dark, and funny usually. Very ironic and deprecating. You kind of bond through the travel. We weren't fighting for five hundred miles. It would mostly be irony, shit food and trying to sleep. That's the life in the initial stages, at least. It's not the life any more, believe you me.

Sting was the band's songwriter. The actual songs, though, were the work of the three of you in the band, weren't they?
Absolutely. Let's call them tracks. The Police's tracks were made because of the chemistry that existed between the three of us. There's no way you can duplicate that. Of course, it's been said five million times over: "We could have done that." Well, you couldn't, and you didn't. The Police was a one-off. If one guy had disappeared from the three, it wouldn't have happened. Take *Every Breath You Take*. God, it wasn't even going to go on the *Synchronicity* record until I put that guitar part on it.

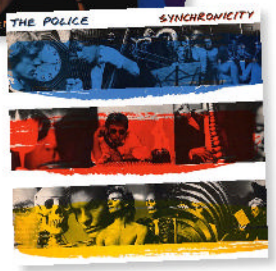
You did win a Grammy for *Behind My Camel*, the instrumental track you contributed to the third Police album, 1980's *Zenyatta Mondatta*.
I did. And I was very pleased. But I could have won a Grammy for anything at that point. I could have farted and it would have got a Grammy.

Summers with The Police at an in-store appearance in California in 1979.

"Proper marriages don't go with a band at the fantastical point we were at."

Following on from 1979's *Regatta de Blanc* (*Message In A Bottle, Walking On The Moon*), *Zenyatta Mondatta* (*Don't Stand So Close To Me, De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*) was the second of four consecutive UK No.1 albums for The Police. Their fifth and final studio album, 1983's *Synchronicity*, also topped the *Billboard* chart in the US. They supported *Synchronicity* with a stadium tour of the US, including a 70,000 sell-out at Shea Stadium in NYC. But by then the three of them were already breaking up. Relations between them had become so strained that they had made *Synchronicity* from three separate rooms at AIR Studios in Monserrat. They reconvened in London in July 1986, meaning to make a new record. But the sessions soon collapsed, and soon after The Police disbanded.

From 1978 to 1983 you kept up a relentless recording and touring schedule with The Police.
It was a whirlwind. We were so incredibly popular, not just in England but everywhere in the world. Japan, even fucking India. All over. Basically we were always on tour. We never stopped. We were making a lot of money, so the manager never wanted us to rest. It was exhilarating and wonderful, and exhausting. An amazing experience. To be that popular and that recognised everywhere you went. It got so you couldn't leave the house in the end. Or a hotel room. It was this sort of clichéd, fantasy world and we inhabited it for a very long time. It's gone now, all changed with the internet. I think we had the height of the golden period, the glory years.



The flip-side to working to such a degree is the personal toll. You went through a divorce in 1981. How can you ever weigh that cost?
It's a very hard thing to balance. There's the shadow side to it. I was married, we had a baby. My very smart and successful wife, Kate, after we got to a point, she told me: "That's it. I've had enough. Not any more for me." You can imagine

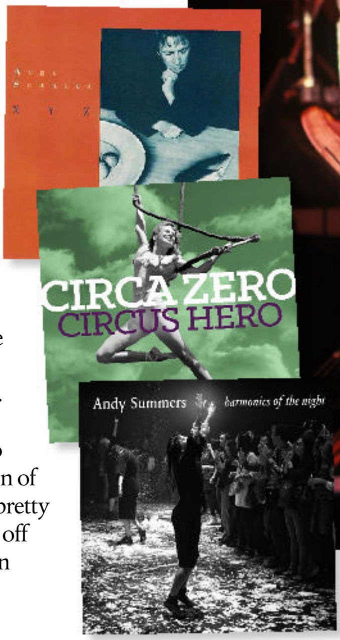
GETTY x2

Circa Zero, May 2014: (l-r) Summers, Rob Giles, Frederik Bokkenheuser.

Summers with The Police playing to a sold-out Shea Stadium in 1983.

the life I was leading. If you're a woman, married to a bloke, and he's got hundreds of other women coming after him every day… I don't have to be explicit here. You see where I'm going. Trying to balance that with a wife and a kid. And I'd had to go into tax exile. So yes, we got divorced. Same with Sting and Stewart. They both got divorced too. Proper partnerships and marriages don't go with a band at the fantastical point we were at. The happy part for me is Kate and I got back together four years later, once the insanity was all over.

How seriously did the three of you try to make a follow-up to *Synchronicity*?
That was a complete fuck-up. Everyone was desperate for us to get together again. Sting was off on his own. He'd made his solo record [1985's *The Dream Of The Blue Turtles*]. We were going to have a trial run at a studio in North London. Stewart went out on a horse the day before we started. Stewart was playing polo in those days. He fell off the horse, broke his collar bone and couldn't play the drums. That was the end of it. And Sting didn't want to write new songs. So all we did was a wanky new version of *Don't Stand So Close To Me*. It was a pretty limp affair. If Stewart hadn't come off his bloody horse it could have been a different story.



What's the immediate sense you have when you've been through such an intense experience and then, at a stroke, it's vanished from your life?
A huge sense of loss. I found it incredible. After all the noise and adulation for years on end, suddenly it's not there any more. You are now famous. What are you going to do? Start all over again, go back to the music. And I did. I made *XYZ* [his first solo album of 1987]. Then I moved back out to California and started to make instrumental records. So my recovery was all through the music. In my case, I did get back with my wife, and Kate got pregnant with twins. I got a studio. It was sort of a rebuilding of a life. The difference being, now you've got some money and you're well-known, and so everyone's interested still. It wasn't as if you were starting from ground zero. You just had to be very good with whatever you put out.

Altogether, Summers has made 13 solo albums, most of them instrumental, the latest being 2021's *Harmonics Of The Night*. He had already put down a marker when still a member of The Police, recording a brace of instrumental albums in collaboration with Robert Fripp: 1982's *I Advanced Masked* and 1984's *Bewitched*. In 2013 he formed another trio, Circa Zero, and with them recorded 2014's one-off album *Circus Hero*. He also has six film scores to his name, and has written two books: his 2006 memoir *One Train Later*, and a 2021's *Fretted And Moaning*, a collection of short stories.

Inevitably, he has never got close to eclipsing The Police. In 2003 the band were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Four years later, on the evening of February 11, Summers, Sting and Copeland were reunited on stage as The Police, opening the 2007 Grammy Awards ceremony at the Staples Centre in LA. That May, they launched The Police Reunion Tour with two shows in Vancouver, Canada. The tour ran for more than a year and ended up being the third-highest-grossing of all time. On stage they sounded rejuvenated. The intangible alchemy going on between the three of them just as potent.

"I could have farted and it would have got a Grammy."

Yet by the time of the final show, at New York's Madison Square Garden, they were also as far apart as ever. They haven't played together since. In the intervening period from then to now, silence, except for the current re-release of The Police's *Greatest Hits* on double vinyl. Better than anything, it's this compilation that sums The Police up. ▷

GETTY x2

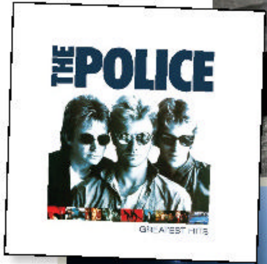
The Police being inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2003.

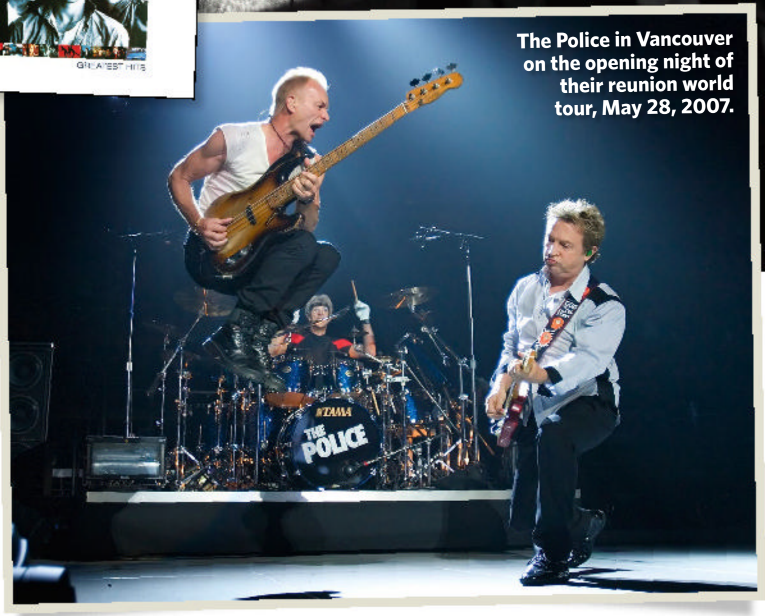
It'll be alright on the night: The Police at rehearsals for the Grammy awards in 2007: (l-r) Sting, Stewart Copeland, Andy Summers.

Sixteen songs, the most recent 40 years old, but unforgettable and indelible still.

Pointedly, Miles Copeland wasn't invited to return as The Police's manager. How else had things changed between the 1980s and the reunion tour?

It was all kind of technical. Going back to the early days, I'd just turn up with my guitar and amp, and that was it. We were now in a whole different ball game. Stewart had a gigantic set-up. I had a complicated set-up, a very advanced pedal board and operated remotely off stage. Very slick. Sting had his thing going on. So each one of us had his guy, or guys, to oversee his own technical side. You could call it three different universes. But they all came together to create one thing. You couldn't have done it any other way. It wasn't the way we started, but it's the way we ended up.





The Police in Vancouver on the opening night of their reunion world tour, May 28, 2007.

The reunion shows also emphasised how powerful the three of you are as a band. How difficult was it to once again let go of something that good?

If it was up to me I wouldn't have let it go. It's an interesting subject, and to do with fragility, frailty, ego and all that. I thought we could have gone on and played for years. We could have made some great new records. I don't want to say too much more, because it'll get too personal. It's sad. We could have done more, but it wasn't to be. One of the greatest bands of all-time got short shrift, I'm afraid to say.

"I wouldn't have let The Police go. It's an interesting subject to do with fragility, frailty, ego and all that. It's sad."

All those songs aren't about to be forgotten, though, are they?

That's why it's one of the greatest bands in history. The songs won't go away. *Every Breath You Take* has passed one and a half billion plays on Spotify. It's amazing when you consider the circumstances it was made in. I've just finished a fourth tour of Brazil with Call The Police (with whom he's joined by two Brazilian musicians: bassist/singer Rodrigo Santos and Joao Barone on drums). We do all the Police hits and we're really very good together. We were killing it every night of the tour. Mob scenes. You go: "Wow, how can this be?" It's a very enjoyable thing to do once a year.

To come full circle and go back to your photographs. When you look at them, what do they tell you about yourself?

That at least I've got something to do when I'm out on the road. I'm not the sort of person who sits in his room and watches TV. As well as purely enjoying playing guitar, and being in a band, I have this other sub-set going on in my mind. I've a certain sort of energy I get from that. It shows me I'm alive. It keeps me alive. The act of creativity is all-important to me. I feel as if I must be making something all the time. Not that I'm a nutter, or work-obsessed. Guitar, writing and photography. Those are the three things I do. That's enough.

So what's next?

I'm planning on making another record. I've never gone so long without doing one. Covid got in the way. I'm working on a TV series, too, about guitar riffs. I can't say too much more about it at this point, but it's going to happen in the next three or four months, I expect. I don't want to stop. Having said that, I'm probably going to go off now and end up watching the fucking telly. ●

The Police's Greatest Hits is out now via UPC. Summers's exhibition Harmonics Of The Night/A Series Of Glances is at the Leica Gallery, London until April 30, before moving to the Leica Gallery, Munich until July 15.

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LANDS OF HOPE AND GLORY

Rising Canadian hopefuls **Crown Lands** are modern proggers taking threads from the genre's illustrious past and weaving them into the present.

Words: **Grant Moon**

Last year Crown Lands played the after-party at a Formula 1 Grand Prix, at the personal behest of Bahrain's Prince Salman. "He's the coolest guy ever," says the band's guitarist/bassist/keyboard player Kevin Comeau. "He's really into rock music. We'd toured with Greta Van Fleet, and I guess Prince Salman reached out to their manager to ask if he knew any other new interesting rock bands. He watched our *Odyssey* live performance video, and took a chance on us. Nick Mason was in the audience. Our song *The Oracle* is a fourteen-minute epic with a lot of Floyd in it, and the whole time I was just like: 'Do it for Nick, man! Do it for Nick!' It was amazing."

Twenty-something duo Crown Lands derive much from Pink Floyd on *Fearless* – their second, tune-freighted, none-more-prog album – but it's fellow Canadians Rush who remain their North Star. It's not a stretch to say that Crown Lands are to Rush what Greta Van Fleet are to Led Zeppelin. When *Classic Rock* moots the comparison, singer/drummer Cody Bowles laughs loudly. "That's *totally* fair. I *love* that! We get the Greta Van Fleet comparisons. But they're not necessarily prog."

Greta aren't, but Crown Lands very much are. When Bowles and Comeau started out back in 2015, they drew attention with their bluesy, garage-rock sounds. Early EPs *Mantra* and *Rise Over Run* had White Stripes and Zeppelin vibes – quality stuff but nothing to stop you in your tracks. But as their confidence and standing grew they reached for the music they really wanted to play. On 2021's ambitious sci-fi epic *Context: Fearless Pt.I* and last year's *White Buffalo* EP (featuring that Floydy piece *The Oracle*) they've scaled right up, and now proudly fly the flag for retro prog played with very modern smarts.

Comeau actually has Rush's 'Starman' logo tattooed on his arse. And, in a way, so does *Fearless*. The album's 18-minute *Starlifter: Fearless Pt.II* draws on Rush's *2112* and *Moving Pictures* albums (with some Zeppelin, Floyd and Jeff Buckley in there too). Comeau used his Bahrain money to commission a custom-built double-neck guitar/bass; he's mates with Geddy Lee's bass tech John 'Skully' McIntosh, and got some exact measurements from Lee's gear for the design. He uses Moog Taurus bass pedals, and the same model of chorus pedal Alex Lifeson favoured in Rush's heyday. Crown Lands' music has some fiddly time signatures, garnished with Neil Peart-like drum rolls from Bowles, whose vocal register naturally leans towards the Geddy heights.

The best friends recorded most of the *Fearless* album in Toronto last year with former Rush producer Dave Bottrill. Bowles recalls that they knew when they'd overstepped the line from influence into pastiche – on the other side of the control-room glass, Bottrill would roll his eyes. "It usually comes down to Kevin playing something and I'm like: 'No, that's *too* close,'" says Bowles. "'Let's tone it down a bit on this one.'"

Two of its tracks – *Context: Fearless Part I* and the charging *Right Way Back* – were recorded with another Rush producer, Nick Raskulinecz, in Nashville in early 2020. Bowles played Neil Peart's own *Clockwork Angels* kit on both tracks, the latter written in tribute to the late drummer.

The Rush thing's a fair cop, says Comeau, non-defensively, but explicable. It's perhaps a product of the referential sense of humour the two of them share. "We quote things like [Will Ferrell comedy] *Step Brothers* or *Dumb And Dumber*, things from our childhood. So it's no surprise that we use some of our favourite records or songs as touchstones too. *Interfacing The Machine* – the 11/8 section in *Starlifter* – started as a joke: what would happen if Steve Howe jammed with The Terminator?!"

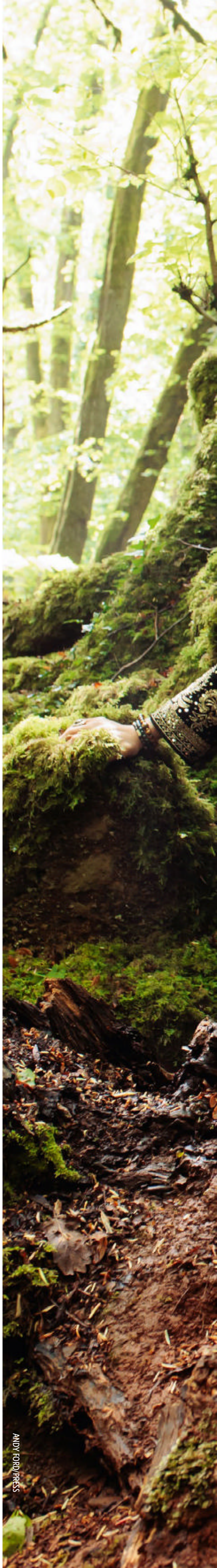
> **"We love the more organic-sounding progressive rock of yore, so we channel that."**
>
> **Cody Bowles**

Accordingly, there's a little Yes alongside the Rush, as well as some Queen; *Starlifter*'s arpeggiated intro owes a debt to that of *Father To Son*, from *Queen II*, an album with the widescreen, cinematic dimension the pair, Comeau says, are reaching for.

"I always wanted to see what would happen if you did Brian May three-part 'guitarmony' with a Robert Fripp tone," he says. "That throaty violin sound he got on King Crimson records like *Red*. That's where you get to the lead breaks in [catchy, digestible rocker] *Dreamer Of The Dawn* and [*Fearless*'s closing, minor-key anthem] *Citadel*. Hopefully by combining two or three things you love, you create something new that might be exciting and might inspire the next wave of players."

In these days of tech- and prog-metal, of post- and math-rock, left-field rock bands like this have plenty of genres to straddle. Polyphia's guitarist Tim Henson recently coined the term 'boomer bends' to describe the traditional, expressive string bending used liberally by Hendrix, Page, May, Gilmour and so many other old-school greats. His flippant yet pithy term struck a divisive chord among players, causing debate/vitriol online among fans of 'the old ways' and those of 21st-century techie rock's sleeker, slightly colder climes.

"Oh, the boomer bends are plentiful in our world!" Comeau says proudly. "That's just where I come from, man. That's the ▷



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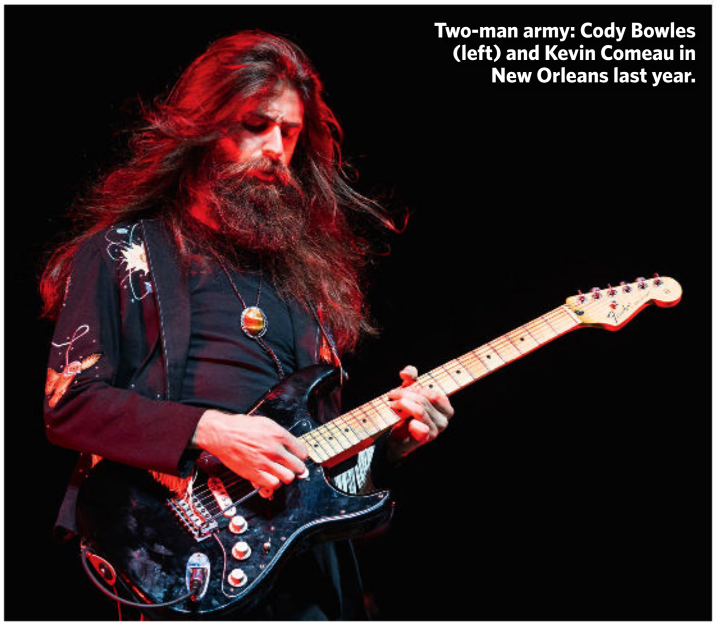

Two-man army: Cody Bowles (left) and Kevin Comeau in New Orleans last year.

kind of music that really inspires me. Fripp, Adrian Belew, Brian May, David Gilmour, Alex Lifeson, Duane Allman – those are some of the guys I look to for tone and technique.

"As a kid discovering Crimson, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Genesis and Van der Graaf Generator, I was disappointed there wasn't much of that orchestral lushness in the modern landscape," Comeau continues. "Progressive music had shifted more to the technical, polyrhythmic world. Nothing wrong with that at all. But for me, from 1972 through to 1982 there was a really exciting production and writing style that still feels timeless. There are some really exciting bands out there – [Norwegian torch bearers] Wobbler are a great example – but we're not seeing that music in the mainstream any more. It's understandable, right? I still can't believe that in 1972 Emerson, Lake & Palmer were the biggest band in the world! I don't think we'll see that again."

"There's a certain level of 'mathiness' that's come in with more modern prog," says Cody Bowles. "We love it, but it's not what we want to create. We really love the older, more organic-sounding progressive rock of yore, so we channel that and ignore what's happening around us, basically. With Rush, I've always appreciated that they're very much progressive, but they're not beating your head in with intense syncopated compound time signatures. They get really complex sometimes, but it always has this feeling of organic honesty that I really love. If we took no other inspiration from them, I would love to maintain that through our music."

Lyrically, Crown Lands are world builders. Bowles is a huge fan of sci-fi (*Dune*, *Star Wars*). Comeau is into Stephen King and that down-home Chekhov, John Prine. *Fearless* isn't a concept album, but *Starlifter*, *Context* and strident rocker *Lady Of The Lake* all stem from a fantastical mythos they're constructing (aided by some jaw-dropping, big-budget videos).

"There's The Syndicate," Bowles explains, "a conglomerate of companies and people trying to extract resources from other solar systems, and colonising planets. The character Fearless lives on a planet that used to be this beautiful, Utopian society, until The Syndicate arrived, stripped its resources and left it in such a state that all life there was destroyed. So Fearless vowed to get revenge. And that's where we're at in the timeline at the end of *Starlifter*."

So far, so *Avatar*, and both stories have roots in our own real, rather fucked world. Crown Lands' concern for the indigenous people of Canada and their territories is well documented (and they're no fans of the country's Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau). The area from which they take their name was once owned by the Queen, and is now regulated by the Canadian government. Most of that land, Comeau explains, "is either old-growth forests now decimated by the logging industry, or it's the oil sands out in Alberta, now broken up through fracking, or it's indigenous reservations – the plots of land where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police rounded up the indigenous people on their own land and basically imprisoned them in order to build a railway system."

> **"Fripp, Brian May, David Gilmour, Alex Lifeson... those are some of the guys I look to."**
>
> **Kevin Comeau**

Bowles's ancestry lies in the First Nations Mi'kmaq people, and the song *Citadel* is an anthem for the Wet'suwet'en nation, in Western Canada. "It's about the water protectors out there," he says. "They've been fighting the RCMP off their sovereign land for years now; they're seen as criminals, and slandered in the news. I wanted to illustrate how those people protecting the lifeblood of our ecosystems are modern heroes – knights if you will, fighting for the good of our earth. Without clean water, what do we have?"

There's more here, too, alongside the social/eco-activism and fantastical tales. Bowles, now 27, studied psychology, and the stomping 80s rocker *The Shadow* deals with an element of Jungian theory. "It's a beckoning to look within and accept those parts of yourself you may feel uncomfortable with, and grow," Bowles reasons. "Everyone's got their things that they have to grapple with, and this song's like a Trojan horse of a metal song saying: 'Look within yourself. Do that work and it'll help you in the end.'"

Three years ago, Bowles and Comeau had work of their own to do. As Crown Lands' star ascended, the pressure got to them. They had spent too much time on the tour bus together, developed what Comeau calls 'unhelpful coping mechanisms', and fell out badly. They didn't see each other for more than a year. With its deepish-cut chorus reference to Mahavishnu's *The Inner Mounting Flame*, Crown Lands' song *Reflections* is about how they knocked their own heads together, rekindled their friendship and got back to it. Both say the friendship is now stronger than ever.

Good thing, too. After that rapprochement came all this quality proggy activity, boomer bends an' all. Their cover of The Beatles' *Come Together* was adopted as the anthem for Canada's football team in their short-lived campaign for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. A Bahrain prince has them on speed-dial. And to mark the release of *Fearless* they've been on tour across Canada. Things are going well.

Performing live, the pair make for an amazing spectacle. As was the case with Rush, you wonder how so few people can make so much noise. Singing drummers are a rare, treasured thing, and Bowles takes their place among the best of them. Comeau, with his custom double-neck guitar-bass, banks of keyboards and racks of effects, weaves the tapestry of their immense records. And, true to their influences (and echoing Queen's early 'No Synthesisers' disclaimer), they don't use backing 'tapes'.

They played the UK last May, but at time of writing there are no European dates in the diary. "We're working on it," says Bowles. "International touring's just through-the-roof expensive now. Freighting's gone up a hundred per cent. But I love it across the pond. You're quicker to understand what we're about than in the States and Canada. We absolutely need to come back."

Fearless is out now via Spinefarm/Universal Music Canada.

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SPIRITS PAST, SPIRITS PRESENT

Re-made and remodelled, and with a critically acclaimed new album that echoes moments from their post-punk past, **The Damned** head into the future still with plenty to offer and to thrill.

Words: **Ian Fortnam**

The tortuous road to The Damned's latest album *Darkadelic* – a career-encapsulating return-to-form that finds the revitalised quintet at the top of their game – begins on the stage of The London Palladium.

It's October 2019. All Hallows' Eve is imminent, and the gothically inclined punk veterans' Hammer House Of Horror-approved Night Of A Thousand Vampires is upping the ante for live rock theatre. Freaks caper, aerialists twirl, jugulars gape, and Damned vocalist Dave Vanian enters a coffin as Dracula before re-emerging post-interval, head freshly shaved, as Nosferatu.

No one is more impressed than the rest of the band, when they finally see the show upon its release on DVD (last October).

"That gig was a revelation to me," admits perma-bereted guitar maestro Captain Sensible. "I didn't see any of the visuals until I saw the film. I had no idea all that stuff was going on, I was concentrating on playing my guitar in the bloody dark. I'm so glad I had a decent tone that night, because Jimmy Page was watching. When I spoke to him after, I said: 'I'm ashamed to have to admit, Jimmy, that I may have stolen a few of your licks over the years.' He laughed and said: 'You wouldn't be the first, Captain.'"

For Damned Disciples of long-standing, the Night Of A Thousand Vampires seemed to mark the culmination of a significant period of stability – within a band historically synonymous with anarchy and chaos. That Vanian and Captain had been comfortably back in harness since '96 was remarkable enough, but that they'd managed to retain the services of the same drummer (Andrew 'Pinch' Pinching) for 20 years appeared to border on the miraculous.

Surely, all the 2019 Damned line-up had to do to reap the rewards of two decades' hard work was stay together. Almost inevitably, Pinch chose this very moment to tender his resignation.

"He told me a couple of days before the show," Vanian remembers. "Took me aside in a hotel room."

"It was a bit of a shocker," adds Sensible. "He's a tough act to follow. His style of drumming's so precise, so powerful."

"He had a really good run," says bassist Paul Gray, before concluding: "But we've got Will [Taylor] now."

And so they have. But before we concentrate on 2023's immaculately remodelled Damned, let's consider the next significant announcement regarding their future. It came after Pinch's departure, and after the Palladium's inundation with the undead.

Calling a between-covid-lockdowns press conference in October 2020, the band's original line-up (Vanian, Sensible, guitarist Brian James and drummer Rat Scabies) revealed their intention to re-unite the following summer for a run of UK shows. The shows were ultimately postponed until late last year.

To the outside observer, the impression given was of a band in uncharacteristic retreat. Following decades of forward motion, which had culminated in landmark shows at the Royal Albert Hall and the Palladium – and an unprecedented Top 10 album in the shape of the Tony Visconti-produced *Evil Spirits* – this latest reunification of the old firm appeared to be a step backwards. A direct reaction to the departure of Pinch, and, despite the coincident release of *The Rockfield Files* EP (the last to feature Pinch), a step aside from the 'proper' 21st-century Damned line-up completed by Monty Oxymoron (keyboards) and *Black Album*/*Strawberries* veteran Paul Gray.

But, as is so often the case with fact-deficient speculation, all was not quite as it seemed.

"Plans had been in progress to reunite the original band for about fifteen years," says Vanian. "It's taken a long time to put various bits and bobs together to make it happen. It seemed never-ending, certainly over the last ten years. It was now or never in some respects."

> **"The band's encompassed so many genres... The Damned has no parameters."**
>
> **Paul Gray**

After years of rumours concerning insurmountable antipathy, the original Damned managed to play relatively nicely throughout a run of shows that teetered permanently on the brink of mayhem.

"We all wanted it to happen," Sensible says of the reunion tour. "And it just didn't make any sense not to do it. Various Damned line-ups have had a stab at playing those songs since that era, but the original line-up recreated the original garage wall of sound beautifully on that tour."

Still, it was noted in certain quarters that some members of the band were not quite as match-fit as others.

"I can understand that point of view," Captain says, nodding. "But Brian and Rat always were the anarchic side of the band. I saw my job as a bass player on the first album was to hold them together and stop them going off in different directions."

As Sensible notes, both James and Scabies ("The best drummer of his and several other generations," according to Vanian) employ immense power when they play. And so, of necessity, in order to maintain the band's trademark "controlled chaos", Vanian and Sensible always had to be "the soberer of the four".

"It sounds daft to say it about myself," a smiling Captain says. "What with my legendary prowess with alcoholic beverages…"

"It was a real pleasure," Vanian insists, giving the impression of a man who'd rather be moving on. "We all got along and it was a nice full stop ▷

The Damned 2023: (l-r) Paul Gray, Will Taylor, Dave Vanian, Captain Sensible, Monty Oxymoron.

TIMO JÄGER/PRESS

to the career of the original band. The tour was mainly for the fans, but also to bury some baggage. And also a thank you, because I don't think I would have even gone into the music business if that first meeting with Rat and BJ hadn't happened."

And will it ever happen again?

"I really don't think so."

"We're more than just a three-chord punk band – which we never were."

Dave Vanian

Concurrent to the release of 2020's *The Rockfield Files* EP, the announcement of the reunion tour, the postponement of the reunion tour, rehearsals for the reunion tour and ultimately the reunion tour itself, the actual, present-day, one true Damned were busily moving forward. Not least of all, they were auditioning for a new drummer.

"There were several in the running," says Vanian, "but none impressed me like Will. I also wanted somebody a bit younger. Not because of energy, but attitude. The hardest thing to maintain in any group is that optimism and fire in your belly to do something. And The Damned have always insisted on that, because we're always pushing boundaries and trying new things, things that might be hard for us to do, but that we do anyway."

"He was a bit different to previous drum stool incumbents," offers Paul Gray. "He had everything down pat and was incredibly versatile, but he also looked cool."

"Some good people turned up," Captain explains. "But, crucially for him, he was the only one that was wearing a cravat."

Stylish percussionist in place, work duly commenced on the raw materials that would eventually become *Darkadelic* with producer Thomas 'Mitch' Mitchener. Having done such a good job of mixing the *Night Of A Thousand Vampires* show, Mitchener was a natural choice.

"I wanted to work with a producer who had a young ear but also an appreciation for live recorded music," says Vanian. "And when I say 'live' I don't mean all done step-by-step on computers with various auto-tunes and god-knows what else. I wanted to go back to what we do best, which is five guys in a room that play the song and overdub a few bits on. And I wanted a more guitar-based sound on this album, because *Evil Spirits* wasn't as guitar-led as I would've liked."

"We don't want perfection, or any of this bloody studio wizardry," attests a proudly zeitgeist-averse, vinyl-devoted Captain; a man who will, by his own admission, walk out of a supermarket mid-shop if they've got too much auto-tune on their muzak. "Well, I say we don't want any of it, we don't want too much of it… Obviously you want a bit of sparkle."

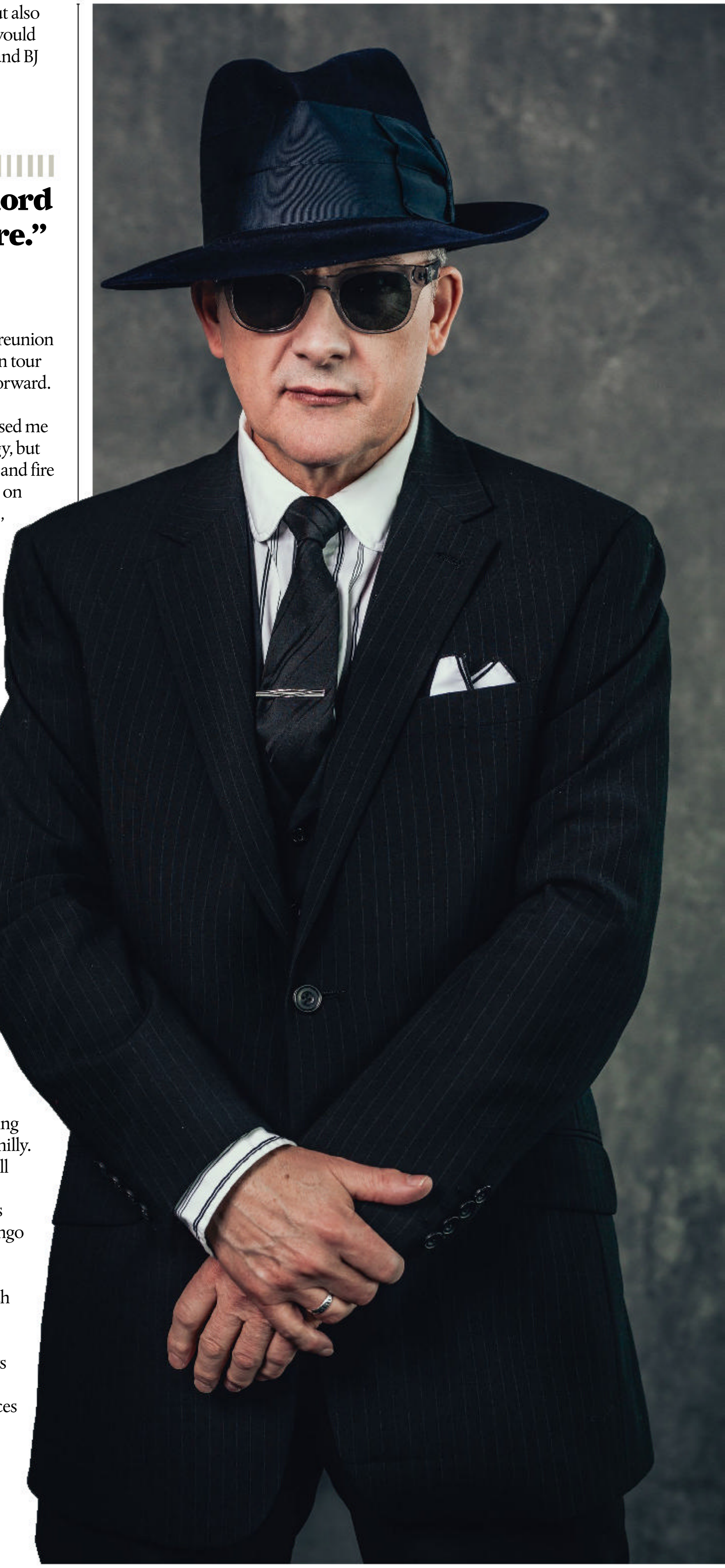
Following a timely break six months into the first covid lockdown, which had stymied plans to get on with the album, work finally commenced on rough demos that would become instrumental backing tracks in the brilliantly named Shabbey Road, a small studio in Caerphilly.

The sessions doubled up as a chance to get used to playing with Will Taylor. They were intense daily, 10-hour stints, with the band honing rhythm parts ("We arranged the songs a little bit better this time," says Captain. "I don't like to use The Beatles as an example, but the way Ringo plays the drums is always the right bit at the right time. We spent two weeks putting the backing tracks down for this record, and Will was absolutely brilliant") while allowing embryonic material – pretty much an equal split of songs from Vanian and Sensible, and one from Gray – to flow and develop organically.

"We had some really great jams, Captain, Will, Monty and me," says Paul Gray. "Just freak-outs to see what would happen."

A further 10 days of painful editing, and inspired vocal performances from an exceptionally in-form Vanian at Kore Studios, West London with an intuitively in-tune Mitch at the controls ultimately produced a dozen tracks of pure gold, vintage Damned.

"One of the joys of being the bass player with The Damned is that nothing is set in stone," says Gray (previously helicoptered back into the line-up just in time to appear on *Evil Spirits*). "The band's made so many diverse albums, encompassed so many genres, that there's no



rules for doing anything. The Damned has no parameters, there's no control asserted by any publisher or record company, it's what anyone comes up with that fits into the general feel of however the record is going to be."

"Each member guides their own song to completion," Sensible adds. "All the editing is done by the songwriter, and I'm so glad that they're all as fussy and anal about stuff as I am, because they work really hard on the arrangements, but not in a poncy way; we left some rough edges. I was amazed when Dave came up with the title, which only came up when we had just about finished it, because that pretty much sums it up."

"Some good people turned up. But, crucially for Will, he was the only one wearing a cravat."

Captain Sensible on auditioning their new drummer

Darkadelic irresistibly echoes moments from the band's post-punk past: the warm, strident, Rickenbacker-driven, Who-alike harmonics of *The Black Album*, the imaginative garage/psych of *Strawberries*, the gothic chamber pop of the *Grimly Fiendish*-spawning *Phantasmagoria*.

"Each album reflects change," says Vanian. "And somehow between the different creative input of Paul, Captain, Monty and myself, *Darkadelic* has elements of everything we've done previously… Which is great, and what we intended."

Lead single and opening track *The Invisible Man* reflects Vanian and Gray's love for the gothic end of 60s pop and psychedelia, with Vanian's lush melodrama exploded into hyperspace by a "mad, double-time, frenetic psych freak-out" middle section inspired into being by Paul posing the question: "What would The Seeds do?" The bassist's up-tempo *Motorcycle Man* concludes with an evocative and cinematic Sensible outro: "I could see the camera panning back as the motorcycle goes off in a cloud of dust into a pinpoint horizon perspective. Cue camera three," muses Captain. "Obviously, that comes from *The Black Album*. We tried to have musical interludes in there, I love instrumental music."

Elsewhere there's *Wake The Dead*, a song co-written by Sensible with long-time collaborator Martin Newell ("a genius", according to the Captain) from Cleaners From Venus, which Gray claims "encapsulates the entire feel of *The Black Album* and *Strawberries* in five and a half minutes, and almost sums up The Damned's entire career in one song."

Inspired by the fact that some fans choose to have *Smash It Up* played at their funeral – not to mention the recent loss of "force of nature" Nik Turner – *Wake The Dead* calls for a celebration of lives lost rather than a descent into abject misery.

"Give your loved ones a bloody good send-off," says Captain. "Celebrate the life. It's punk rock, innit? Give two fingers to the Grim Reaper… I hope it's played when I kick the bucket."

Darkadelic concludes with Vanian (who presents complete GarageBand demos of his songs to the band, complete with guitar and keyboards) set-piece *Roderick*. A goth-tastic, Poe-drizzled masterpiece in the tradition of *Curtain Call* (a Stravinsky-laced epic that Vanian conjured up for *The Black Album* on a second-hand harmonium bought for 40 quid), it comes with timpani, violin and a multi-tracked Latin-chanting coven of Dave Vanians emoting for their immortal souls, as the criminally undervalued Monty Oxymoron gives it plenty on the pianoforte.

It's a stunningly ambitious conclusion to an album that captures The Damned bursting through yet another artistic glass ceiling. An early contender for Album Of The Year that could be considered the band's finest yet. Vanian's ambitions for The Damned, meanwhile, remain firmly rooted in banishing persistent, if misguided, preconceptions.

"I'm hoping it finally translates into people understanding that we're a bit more than just a comedy act or a three-chord punk band – which we never were. We've had a fair amount of prejudice against us over the years. The name's sometimes stood in the way of people listening to the music. So it's a tricky one."

Tricky indeed. Whether celebrating a legendary past or powering into an unwritten future, they're Damned if they do and Damned if they don't.

Darkadelic is out now via earMusic.

TIMO JÄGER/PRESS x2

BRAVE NEW WORLD

With a new album that's their heaviest, rockiest yet, **Rodrigo y Gabriela** are boldly taking metal and rock to where no one has so successfully taken it before.

Words: **Grant Moon**

Gabriela Quintero happily grabs the Grammy statuette and, giggling and proud, holds it up to the webcam. She and Rodrigo Sanchez won the Best Contemporary Instrumental Album category, for *Mettavolution* – which features their monolithic duo-guitar version of Pink Floyd's *Echoes* – at the January 2020 ceremony. It should have been the start of a globe-trotting year. But the year had other plans.

Today Rodrigo y Gabriela are in their studio and HQ in Ixtapa. The town overlooks the Pacific on Mexico's west coast, and sits just 15 minutes' drive from Zihuatanejo, the beachy paradise that Tim Robbins's character Andy DuFresne escaped to at the end of *The Shawshank Redemption*. Bandmates since their teens, both Quintero and Sanchez are approaching their fifties now. They were a couple once. Today they're best friends, and the easy way they share answering questions – giving each other space, occasionally talking over each other with passion – speaks of the pair's chemistry. It's like they're the left and right hand of one guitar player, in sync.

Ixtapa was a welcome refuge when everything went to shit in 2020. "We had a full year ahead of non-stop touring for *Mettavolution*, all over the place," Quintero says. "We won the Grammy, spring came, then the Apocalypse! So we came back down here, as we always do in the worst situations. Even when we were busking we'd always come back here and just play. That's how we process our emotions when things get a little tough. Playing guitar heals us."

The latest manifestation of that healing is *In Between Thoughts… A New World* – perhaps R&G's heaviest, rockiest work yet, with Sanchez favouring electric guitar for much of the record.

"When we started this in February 2021we were just writing," Sanchez says. "We didn't know it was going to be the new Rod and Gab album, so we weren't limited by what that might mean."

Over lockdown the pair started a Patreon, got lively on social media and kept the music coming. There was a slinky, slidey read of Radiohead's *Weird Fishes/Arpeggi*, and an arrangement of the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No.25. On their 2021 EP *Jazz* they interpreted Kamasi Washington, Snarky Puppy and tango genius Astor Piazzolla, while the previous year's *Mettal* EP featured covers of Slayer, Megadeth and Metallica.

The latter band, a well-documented influence on the duo, hold a special place in their lives. Quintero and Sanchez are good friends with bassist Robert Trujillo. On Metallica's sprawling tribute album *The Metallica Blacklist*, of the 53 artists participating (Ghost, St. Vincent and Volbeat among them) Rodrigo y Gabriela were the only ones with a song all to themselves; *The Struggle Within* earned them a Grammy nomination for Best Arrangement, Instrumental Or A Capella.

"Our music has a beat, so people feel they can dance, so it's not just like a classical recital."

Gabriela Quintero

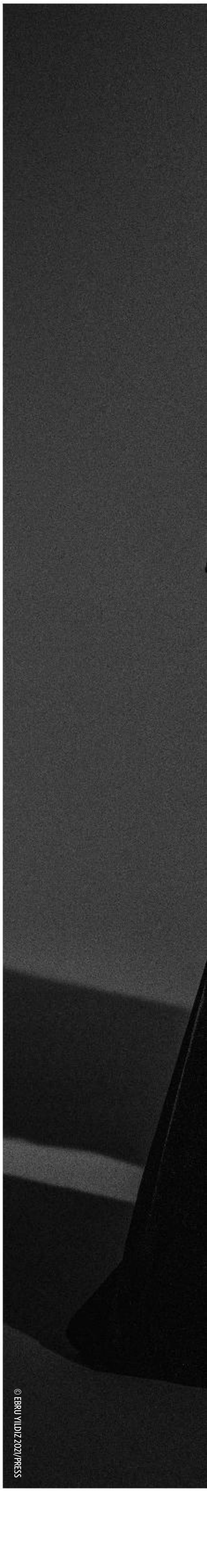
Now, after the struggle of the past few years, *In Between Thoughts… A New World* arrives with a sense of musical and spiritual renewal. "Both of us have been what they call 'spiritual seekers' for many years," says Sanchez. "In the early 2000s I got into Buddhism for a while, and then tried many things. But when I got covid [in 2020], I went through an inward process that gave birth to this album. While I was recovering I saw a video regarding Advaita Vedanta, and it struck me immediately. I talked to Gabriela about it and she got it too."

Advaita Vedanta is a Hindu practice which, Quintero explains, "is mainly about this life being an illusion. There's just one ultimate reality, and we can't process that reality because it's beyond the mind and the brain." Its central tenet, 'nondualism', holds that the Self – the deepest part of us, our true nature – is our connection to that oneness, that ultimate reality. Everything else is a construct of the mind.

Quintero says that as a species we're good at telling ourselves these stories.

"I'm an eco-warrior. Rod was telling me that through nondualism everything in this reality is an illusion. And I had problems with that. I said: 'No! Climate change is real!' Then I realised that [modern spiritual guru Eckhart Tolle's bestseller] *The Power Of Now* – a book that changed my life completely – is [about] nondualism too. The mind is constantly bombarding us with thoughts; 'You have to do this', 'You should have done that.' It fears the future, regrets the past and is never in the present. But when you are present, just observing your breath or your thoughts, there's a stillness that is peace, and that's our true nature."

The album serves as a soundtrack to a story Quintero wrote to process this philosophy. It's a classic hero's journey – the central genderless figure, Advaita, comes into the world, working their way towards the transcendent bliss of nondualism to songs such as *True Nature*, *Egoland* and *Descending To Nowhere*. Quintero's trademark propulsive nylon-string guitar rhythms power the record, dancing with Sanchez's electric lines.



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Broken Rage might be their punkiest self-composed work to date, and their signature flamenco tones are cut with funk, Morricone-esque spaghetti western, analogue synths and post-rock textures. Extra heft comes from the Bulgarian Symphony Orchestra.

"We started to add different instrumentation and electronics," Sanchez says. "Adam [Ilyas, orchestra arranger] was sending us videos of the orchestral recording sessions in Sofia, and we were like: 'Fuck, this is really happening!' We'd changed management after twenty years, had a new team, new label. Everything felt new for us."

Alongside the *In Between Thoughts* they've also released *Stages,* a nine-part cycle of étude-like guitar pieces, each with a striking, surreal video from filmmaker Olallo Rubio. Rubio dressed the pair in all-white outfits and projected onto them images of stars, ocean life, the rainforest. The concept ties into the Vedanta philosophy: our mind is the screen, and what's projected on there isn't real, or at least not part of true consciousness.

"Well it *can* be real," Sanchez clarifies. "But at the same time the real you – in this case, represented by the screen – doesn't go through anything that's been projected onto it. You can see war, hate, love in the actual movie, but all the time the screen is clean."

It's another fascinating chapter in the duo's story, which began more than two decades ago when they ditched their Mexico City rock band Tierra Ácida, and were discovered busking in Dublin by then-rising star Damien Rice. Their self-titled debut album of 2006, which topped the chart in Ireland, featured calling-card tune *Tamacun* and dizzying takes on Zeppelin's *Stairway To Heaven* and Metallica's *Orion*. Film work with renowned soundtrack composer Hans Zimmer followed, along with a show at the White House for then-president Barack Obama, a US Top 25 album with 2014's *9 Dead Alive,* and a ton of touring.

Their virtuosity, charisma, chemistry and easily worn blend of Latin exoticism and rock 'relatability' has taken them to grand venues – London's Royal Albert Hall, Sydney Opera House, the Hollywood Bowl. This year's tour runs from April to November and takes them across the US, Europe and the UK. Wherever they go, something in their (on paper) unlikely fusion just *works.*

"All over the world, people love guitar," says Quintero. "Me and Rodrigo play lots of different styles on guitar. Our music has a beat, so people feel they can dance, so it's not just like a classical recital. That's why it attracts a diversity of people. Well, that's my theory."

In Between Thoughts... A New World is out now via ATO.

AMERICAN BANDSTAND

They sold out Shea Stadium faster than The Beatles. In the early 70s, no American hard rock band was bigger than Grand Funk Railroad. Singer/guitarist Mark Farner looks back.

Words: **Joe Bosso**

GETTY

Recently, a proliferation of clips has appeared on YouTube in which young music fans document their reactions to hearing the music of Grand Funk Railroad for the first time. Their faces are braced with stunned, slack-jawed amazement as they listen. When the music stops and the talking begins, their assessments of the band are typically along the lines of: "Damn, those guys can really jam!" and "What did I just hear?!"

Asked if he's familiar with the videos, Mark Farner lets out a robust laugh. "Hell yeah, I've seen them!" the former Grand Funk Railroad guitarist exclaims. "My friends send me those clips, and I just love watching them. I think it's so cool seeing these young guys getting off to the music we made fifty years ago. What touched people's hearts back then still moves them today. We were fierce. We were big and loud, like we were busting out of the chute. And I was riding the bull, man. You can't fake that kind of excitement. It's either real or it's not." He chuckles, then adds nostalgically: "It sure was a fun time."

For the better part of their career, which lasted from 1969 to 1976, the Flint, Michigan-based Grand Funk Railroad specialised in high-energy, meat-and-potatoes, blues-based hard rock. Originally comprised of guitarist and lead vocalist Farner, drummer and occasional lead singer Don Brewer and bassist Mel Schacher, Grand Funk Railroad formed after the break-up of a local band called Terry Knight & The Pack. As a trio they barnstormed their way through Michigan, performing on bills with fellow Midwestern acts like the Stooges, the MC5 and the Amboy Dukes. Guided by Terry Knight, who retired from the stage to act as the band's manager, Grand Funk Railroad soon exploded nationally, issuing a string of platinum albums that included FM radio hits like *Mr. Limousine Driver*, *Inside Looking Out* and *Mean Mistreater*. With the release of 1970's *Closer To Home*, which included the epic hit *I'm Your Captain/Closer To Home*, the group were all but unstoppable.

"It was the Vietnam era, and I was writing songs like *People, Let's Stop The War*. That song is as relevant today."

"We were the people's band," Farner says. "We sold out Shea Stadium faster than The Beatles, and that was before we had number-one singles on AM radio. We were honest in how we played, and we were honest in what we sang about. It was the Vietnam era, and I was writing songs like *People, Let's Stop the War*. That song is as relevant today as it was back then. That kind of message resounds with people."

Much of Grand Funk Railroad's raucous sound was driven by Farner's unbridled guitar playing, an exuberant mix of tight, power-chord rhythms and fuzzed-out, throat-grabbing leads.

"I didn't play nearly as fast as the other guitarists back then," he says. "My whole approach was: how can I reach the people in the back row with my guitar? I wanted to accentuate the visual image of me on stage with what I played. So if it was simple, but it got the point across, that's what I did."

He thinks, then adds: "That's what I still try to do now, though I think I'm a little more mature with the notes I pick."

During the last few years of their 70s run, Grand Funk Railroad (later known simply as Grand Funk) became a quartet with the addition of keyboard player Craig Frost, and de-fanged their sledgehammer sound, resulting in AM-friendly smashes like *We're An American Band* and a cover of Little Eva's *The Loco-Motion*, both produced by Todd Rundgren. While such moves attracted a new legion of fans, the band's original admirers grew disgruntled. When the group couldn't replicate their chart success, it flamed out following the release of 1976's Frank Zappa–produced *Good Singin', Good Playin'*.

"A lot of people didn't like us being so poppy," says Farner, who these days performs with Mark Farner's American Band. "And I was right there too. I voted against getting a keyboard player. I wanted to keep the emphasis on being a guitar band. It's sad how things went down, but I'm thankful for all we achieved. We hit heights nobody could have imagined. How many people get to say that?"

You've said the original trio was patterned after Cream. How did you distil that sound into something of your own?

We took that British influence, but we weren't literally trying to be Cream. Our main influence was R&B. It's what brought us to the dance floor. That's what we wanted to do; that's what I wanted to do as a guitarist. It wasn't about playing long solos, it was about getting people to dance. I was attracted to rhythm, and I think the guys in Cream were too. They were soulful. We were soulful. When we first started playing gigs, I'd look out and see that half the audience was African-American.

You've cited Hendrix, Clapton and Beck as your biggest guitar influences. Was there anybody before those guys who made a strong impression on you?

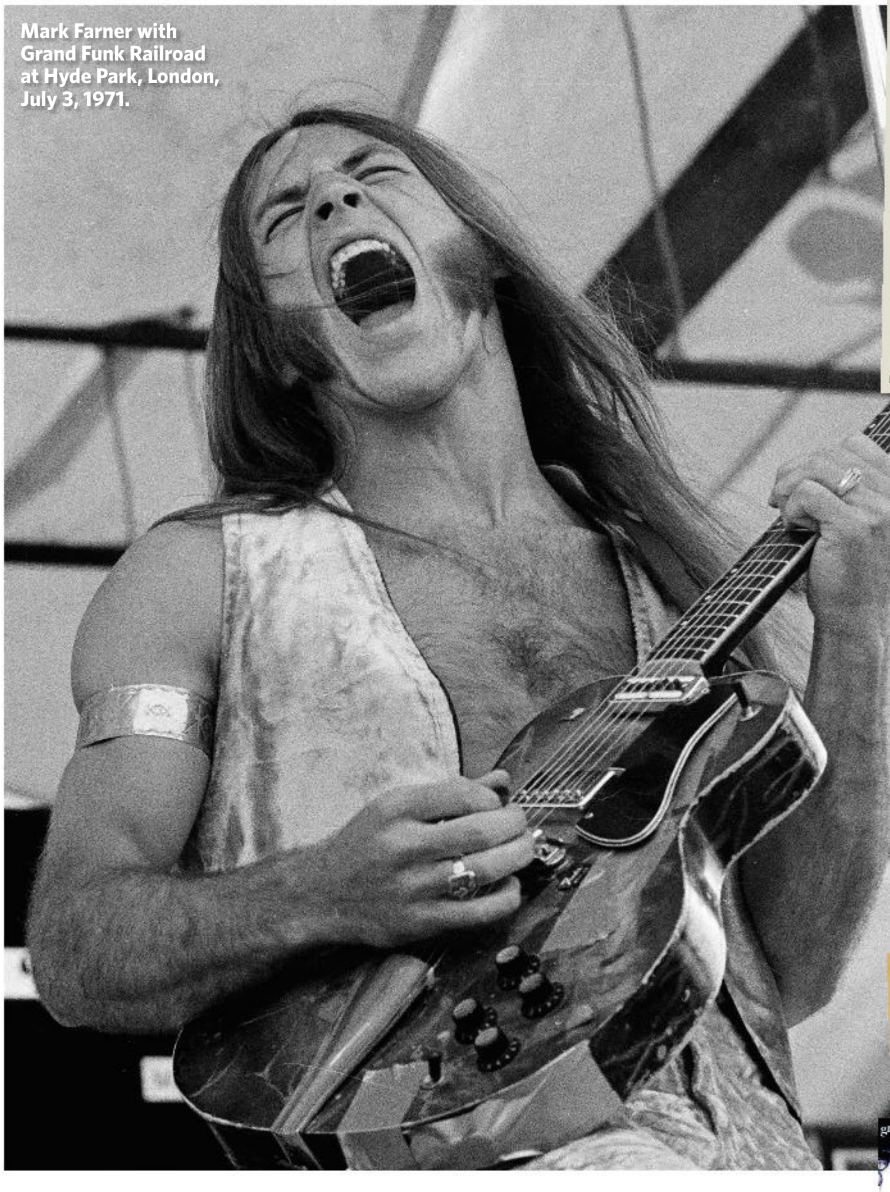
You can put Rick Derringer in there too. I've always admired his style. Before him there was James Burton, who played for Ricky Nelson and Elvis. I would listen to those leads and think: "How does he do that?" I was just a young guitar player with my Kay acoustic, and I could barely play that thing. The strings were so far off the neck, you could use them to shoot an arrow. And of course I dug the early rock'n'roll – Bill Haley and *Rock Around The Clock*. That was the stuff that got me going.

What about Pete Townshend? It seems that he rubbed off on you a little too.

Oh, sure. He was a very solid player, lots of energy and well-crafted parts. I especially liked what he did by cranking up the volume. He took it way outside the norm, and that really rubbed off on me. I always liked messing around with volume.

Were you a natural on the guitar, or did you really have to woodshed and work at it to become good?

I had three lessons, and in the first lesson I was taught to keep my fingernails trimmed so they didn't touch the fingerboard. I would've had ▷



Mark Farner with Grand Funk Railroad at Hyde Park, London, July 3, 1971.

Grand Funk with Frank Zappa, who produced 1976's *Good Singin', Good Playin'*.

"We hit heights nobody could have imagined. How many people get to say that?"

more lessons, but my teacher shot himself in the foot with a 12-gauge while he was hunting. He was all right, but he couldn't teach guitar any more.

After that I taught myself. I watched guys in high-school bands and picked up the chords they were using. Once I got enough chords down, I was off doing it on my own. I loved playing guitar. I'd go to sleep with it on top of me. When I woke up I'd think: "Well, I'd better put it back in the case," but I never did. I always wanted the guitar around.

When Grand Funk were just starting out, how did you go about putting together your sound?

We had gone to see The Kingsmen – they had that song *Louie Louie*. They were using Sunn amps, and they sounded so badass. So we went: "Wow, man, we need some Sunn amps!" But in our quest for them, we found Dave West from Flint, Michigan, and he was building his own amps that were just as big and loud as Sunn amps. They had big tubes and big cabinets. I actually worked in his factory for a time, soldering circuit boards and putting things together. So when Grand Funk took off I said: "We've got to use West amps. He's from Flint, and we're taking him with us."

Around this time you also used a 1961 Gibson Les Paul SG Custom guitar.

I got that from Stevie Marriott. He sold it to me for two hundred dollars. We had played with Humble Pie in the UK, and we told them: "You guys need to come to America. You can open for us and we'll give you a big audience." Steve told me: "I've got this SG that I think you'll really like. I'll bring it with me when we come to the States." And he did. I loved that thing. It was so easy to play and had a nice sound. I ended up giving it to my brother, and I don't know what he did with it.

For the first half of the band's career, you were the main songwriter. Did you feel a lot of pressure?

I didn't feel any pressure whatsoever. It was flowing, man. The songs happened so fast, I couldn't stop 'em!

***I'm Your Captain (Closer To Home)* might be your signature song. Did you have any idea when you wrote it that it would become your radio breakthrough?**

I did. I prayed for that song. I remember saying a P.S. in a prayer: "God, would you give me a song that can reach people and touch their hearts?" And I got up in the middle of the night, picked up a legal pad and, in a half-conscious state, I wrote it down. When I woke up, I poured my coffee and picked up a Washburn acoustic, and I just started playing that opening lick. I thought: "Wow, that's pretty cool!" Then I grabbed my legal pad and sang the rest of it.

It felt good to me, so I took it to rehearsal, and Don and Mel said: "Hey, Farner, that song is a hit, dude!" Because it was way different from anything else we had done. It was there lyrically, and it had that refrain – *'I'm getting closer to my home'* – going out. [Arranger and trumpet player] Tommy Baker did the orchestrations when we recorded it. He said to me: "Mark, man, I want that refrain to go on forever. Give me some room for the orchestration." We must have played it so many times. I remember looking at him like: "Should we stop now?" And he was just going: "Not yet. Keep playing!"

The story goes that at one point you guys made an overture to Peter Frampton to join the band.

The band discussed it, but we never actually spoke to Peter about it. This was around the time that Craig Frost came into the group as a keyboardist. Don wanted a keyboard player who he could write with. He wanted some of that 'mailbox money'. Peter Frampton's a great player, but we never got past the idea stage with that.

And of course you personally were not into the idea of a keyboard player.

I wasn't. Keyboards are good as long as they're edgy and fit in a rock'n'roll song. If they're not

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Getting the Funk out in the early 70s: (l-r) Mark Farner, Don Brewer, Craig Frost, Mel Schacher.

edgy, I don't like 'em. We never got into the progressive thing that was happening back then. We just wanted to stay in the groove.

Did you plan your solos out, or were they improvised in the studio? Your solo in *We're An American Band* sounds perfectly composed.

They were pretty much spontaneous in the studio. I would have to listen back to them to replicate them on stage. Most of the leads for *We're An American Band* was improvised. The only part that wasn't was when I overdubbed the harmony part in the solo. We were listening back to it in the studio, and I just started singing a harmony line. [Producer] Todd Rundgren looked at me and said: "You want to put that on there?" So I did.

What was it like working with Todd Rundgren?

He was great – very laid back most of the time. He'd have his feet up on the console, reading a book. He was just kind of a "go for it" guy. But I remember once when he got really excited. It was on the second record we did with him [*Shinin' On*, 1974], when we cut *The Loco-Motion*. We started playing, and when I did my guitar solo he came out into the studio, grabbed the tape head of the Echoplex and moved it back and forth. It sounded like the guitar was eating itself. We had a lot of fun with that.

Let's talk about how the band broke up. Was there a particular day when you realised it was all over?

"Don Brewer looked at me and said: 'It's over, Farner. I'm done.' I knew it was over then. That was it."

Sure. It was one day in 1976, when Brewer came into rehearsal late – and he was never late for anything. He walked in and said: "Guys, that's it. I'm over it. I've got to find something more stable to do with my life." I said: "You're shitting me." And he looked at me and said: "No, it's over, Farner. I'm done." So I knew it was over then. That was it.

You and Don reunited briefly as Grand Funk Railroad in the early eighties, after which you went solo again. Nowadays Don and Mel are leading their own version of the band. Is there any communication between you?

No. I haven't seen them play, and I'm not interested. They're a sham band. What they're doing isn't Grand Funk, but they don't tell the unsuspecting fans. They don't let them know that the original lead singer and the guy that wrote ninety-two per cent of the music isn't going to be on stage. It's underhanded.

But me, when I play, I'm taking it to the people. I have it in my mind that these people are here because they like me. They're on my side to start with. So I try to give them the nostalgia that they're looking for. I play the songs like they heard them on record. That's what I concentrate on. Even with solos, I don't give 'em any impromptu lead guitar or something that goes on. I've seen bands that do that, and it just sucks, man. I give the people what they want. ●

GFR with Todd Rundgren (second right) in '73.

MAIN: GETTY; BOTTOM: LYNN GOLDSMITH / CAMERA PRESS

MAEL SUPREMACY

Since their dramatic arrival in the UK via TV screens in the early 70s, **Sparks** have continued to make extraordinary music on their own terms. Now they're enjoying a late-career renaissance.

Words: **Rob Hughes**

It's still an unshakable image: Sparks on *Top Of The Pops* in the summer of 1974, performing *This Town Ain't Big Enough For The Both Of Us*, their first hit. The contrast between the two Mael brothers is striking. In neat shirt and tie, with swept-back hair and Charlie Chaplin moustache, the immobile Ron glares out from behind his electric piano. Meanwhile, pretty-boy sibling Russell struts about in a dark suit and satin scarf, his head a tumble of falling curls. John Lennon is among the 15 million viewers watching at home. Stupefied, he phones Ringo Starr – so the legend goes – and tells him he's just seen Marc Bolan singing with Hitler.

Then there's the track itself. Built around a jabbing keyboard riff fed through an echo unit, strafed with gunshots and hitched to a relentless rhythm, *This Town* is topped by Russell's vaulting falsetto. Lyrically it's a Dadaist torrent of bombardiers, beating hearts and zoo animals. In the year of power cuts and the three-day week, Sparks seem like weird exotica from another universe. Their peers on tonight's show – Bryan Ferry and Bad Company included – are rendered one-dimensional by comparison.

This Town… peaked at No.2 in the UK. Sparks' sudden popularity was quickly compounded by

"I think we both feel that what we're doing is making music that we can't hear anywhere else."

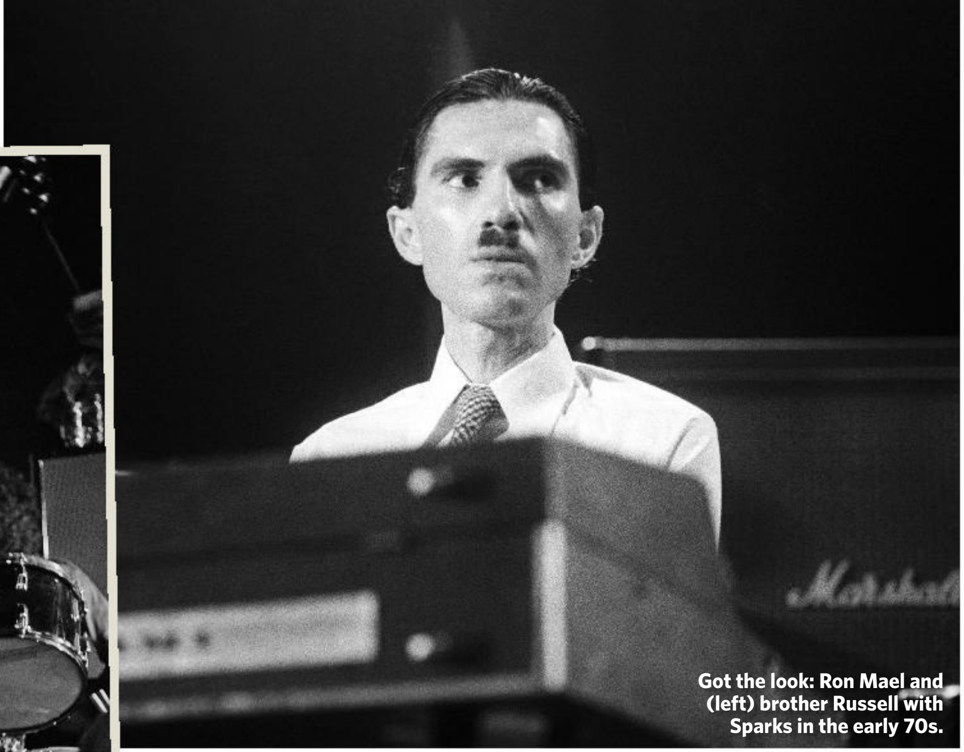
Ron Mael

another Top 10 hit, *Amateur Hour*, and a parent album, *Kimono My House*, loaded with dazzling art-pop songs that challenged convention yet were also fabulously accessible. Sparks were sensational: sharp, clever, witty and new. Their subsequent UK tour provoked hysteria wherever they went, attracting hordes of screaming girls. Serious music fans adored them too. *Melody Maker* readers voted Sparks the brightest hope for '75.

MUNACHI OSEGBU/PRESS

"We'd always idolised British bands," Ron Mael explains today. "We always attempted to be like The Who or The Kinks, even though, stylistically, it didn't turn out that way. So to actually be brought over to the UK by Island [Records] and live out that dream was something amazing."

"Ron and I were huge Anglophiles, so to have it all happen for us was an incredible experience," Russell affirms . "The hard thing to grasp was



Got the look: Ron Mael and (left) brother Russell with Sparks in the early 70s.

"We always attempted to be like The Who or The Kinks, even though, stylistically, it didn't turn out that way."

Ron Mael

that our appeal was on so many different levels. Our image and the music was appealing to a lot of young people, but the lyrical side wasn't consistent with themes for audiences full of screaming girls. So there were a lot of incongruities at the same time. But I think that's also what made it a pretty special thing."

Since that first flush of Sparksmania, the Maels have hardly stopped. They've made a habit of flipping the prescribed notions of pop music. Not only by proving that brothers in bands can co-exist in lasting harmony, but also that the passage of time needn't dilute the creative juices. Sparks have freely changed courses and styles over the years – encompassing everything from hard rock to electronica, dance music to neo-classical pop – but the sheer quality of their output has rarely dipped.

They remain daring provocateurs in an increasingly risk-averse world. The latest proof is *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte*, their twenty-sixth studio album. It's everything that makes Sparks so remarkable: bold, transgressive, in-your-face adventurous. A meta-modern pop opera. "I think we both feel that what we're doing is making music that we can't hear anywhere else," posits Ron. "And we're fortunate that most of our followers expect to be challenged. They'd feel disappointed if we weren't doing things that were pushing it."

"Getting complacent in this period of our career would be the saddest thing for us," Russell adds. "We always fight desperately hard to move on and try new things, to be as bold as we can. That's always been the unspoken credo of this band."

This isn't just fighting talk. Deep into their sixth decade as recording artists, Sparks sit on the threshold of one of the most exciting phases of their lives. As we soon discover, it's a remarkable upturn in fortunes. One that sees rock's greatest and most enduring cult duo finally achieve what they've always wanted.

It's early morning in Los Angeles when *Classic Rock* catches up with the Mael brothers via Zoom. Seventy-four-year-old Russell, with a dark mop of hair matching his casual shirt, sits against a white backdrop dominated by a tasteful fireplace, on which sit a number of ornaments and odd figurines. On the wall is a vintage poster for *Kimono My House*.

Across town, Ron (three years his senior) looks debonair in a navy blue jacket, his pencil-thin moustache and round glasses providing some trademark symmetry. There's a full bookcase behind him, topped with clear plastic cases containing some pricey-looking running shoes. The elder Mael is an inveterate collector. He began accruing Nike Air Jordans in the early 80s. More recent obsessions include snow globes and hand sanitisers (neither of which, sadly, are on display today).

Both men exude an easy, urbane charm. They're bright and articulate, bouncing between topics and leaving space for the other in a way that you imagine mirrors their working practice in the studio. They're rightfully enthused about *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte*, an album alive with enough inventive energy to put bands a third of their age to shame.

Among its many moments that dazzle are *Nothing Is As Good As They Say It Is* and *We Go Dancing*, both of which carry the mordant echo of classic early-70s Sparks. It's fitting, then, that *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte* sees them back on Island Records, with whom they first signed half a century ago.

"Island heard the album and really responded positively to it," Russell explains. "And we were really happy that the reason they wanted Sparks was not based on our past, necessarily, but the music we were making *now*, as something really significant and modern. It's kind of an amazing story. I think they see the album as fresh in the same way that *Kimono My House* was in 1974."

Back then, Sparks had been rescued from relative obscurity. The band, led by the Mael brothers, had released two low-selling albums on the Bearsville label (the first one produced by Todd Rundgren) in the US. But Island saw their potential and threw them a lifeline. Relocating to London, the Maels put together a new five-piece line-up and set about recording *Kimono My House* in the winter of '73.

"Island had this philosophy of being inclusive of a sound that had a strong sense of originality," recalls Russell. "It didn't matter whether it was a reggae group from Jamaica or a stylised rock band like Free, it could all be valid as long as it had a special stamp.

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"Ron and I initially wanted Roy Wood to produce *Kimono My House*. We both loved The Move because they typified great British music – amazing melodies and great singing. But it turned out, for whatever reason, that Roy chose not to produce it. That's when Muff Winwood stepped in. He'd been bass player in the Spencer Davis Group, which was another plus – and I was thinking that maybe he'd bring his brother [Stevie] in to help me with my vocals!"

Acrobatic music and vocals aside, Sparks also dealt in gleefully subversive lyrics, from tragi-comic suicide pacts to Albert Einstein and thwarted equatorial rendezvous.

"Having humour in pop music is sometimes considered kind of frivolous," says chief lyricist Ron. "But we always felt, because of the bands that we originally loved, that lyrics could operate on two levels. A song can be humorous and still work on another, deeper emotional level. Even to this day I marvel at those early Who songs. Sometimes I feel it's a shame that Pete Townshend has grown up emotionally, because we haven't."

Sparks hardly lacked ambition. Around the time of *This Town…* and *Amateur Hour*, they even tried to poach Brian May as guitarist. "It was a period where Queen hadn't really broken through in a big way yet," explains Russell. "We had some conversations with him to sound him out, but it wasn't to be."

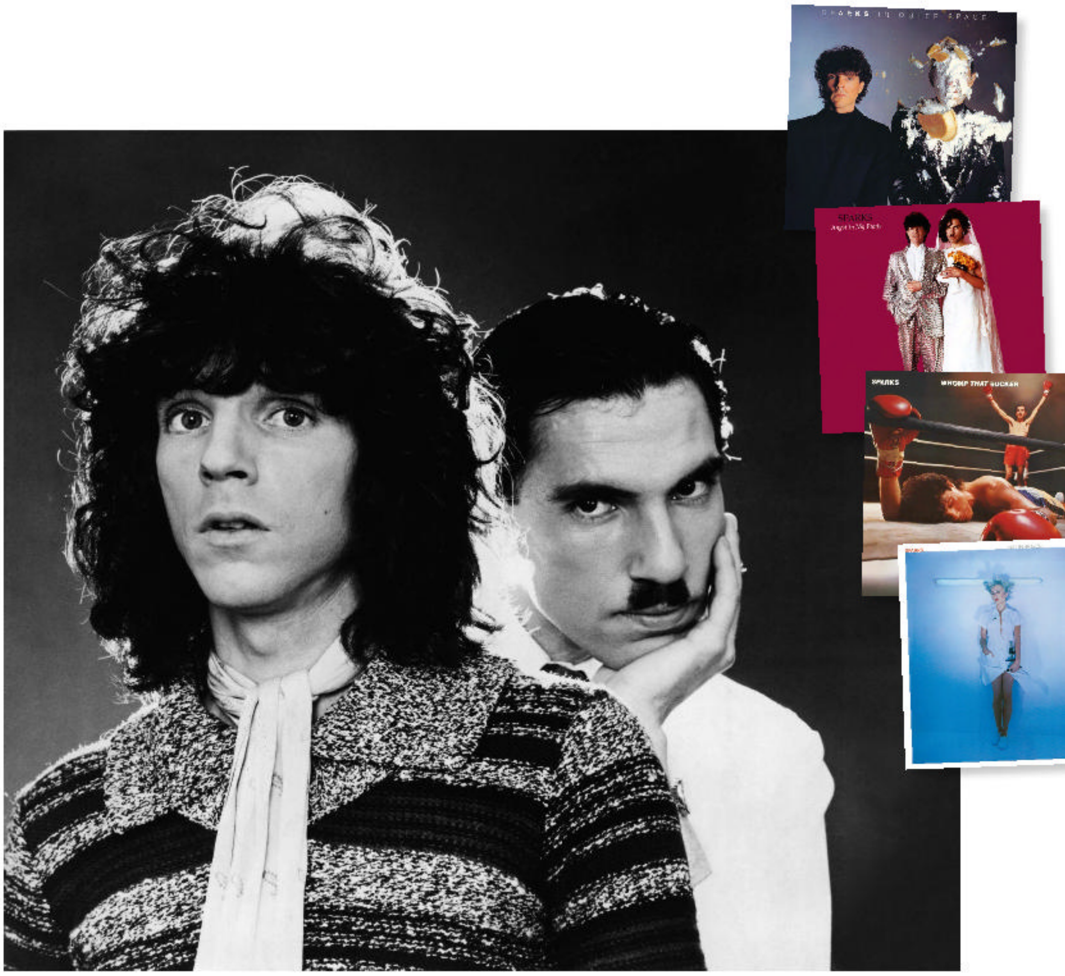
The Maels also kicked against the idea of formula. After *Kimono My House* and follow-up *Propaganda* came 1975's *Indiscreet*. A theatrical marvel overseen by Tony Visconti, it playfully shifted shape between glam, swing jazz, orchestral pop and old-time vaudeville. They followed up in typically perverse fashion – by ditching the band, returning to the States and making Sparks' equivalent of a hard rock album.

Bowie's old guitarist Mick Ronson was going to produce what became 1976's *Big Beat*.

"We rehearsed with him for a week or two, and we even have a rough rehearsal cassette with him playing those *Big Beat* songs," Russell says. "He really liked what we were doing, and his playing sounds absolutely amazing. But then he got an offer to join the Rolling Thunder tour with Dylan and left our project to do that. It's a pity it didn't work out."

Big Beat sold poorly. It marked both the end of an era and Sparks' tenure on Island. For better or worse, it also crystallised the outlier philosophy that would continue to guide the Maels for the rest of their career. There would be no pandering to expectations or past glories. Instead it was all about pure artistic instinct, creating music outside of conventional channels. Beholden to no one but themselves. As Ron puts it: "The best pop music makes you think, 'What *is* that?'"

Giorgio Moroder appeared on Sparks' radar around 1977. The Italian songwriter/producer was the man behind Donna Summer's UK No.1 of that year, *I Feel Love*, a sequencer-driven classic that moved electronic dance music into the mainstream. Suitably inspired by the disparity between vocal warmth and cold machinery, the Maels hired him to collaborate.



The resulting 1979 album *No.1 In Heaven*, layered with modular synths and sequencers, repositioned Sparks as electro-pop mavens. It also delivered a couple of major hits in *Beat The Block* and *The Number One Song In Heaven*.

"Giorgio was just such a master at being able to incorporate electronic elements into popular music," says Ron. "And in terms of songwriting, just to have our kind of focus affirmed by somebody like him was really something. To be exposed to that whole thing was really eye-opening for us. He was pretty merciless at going through our songs, but ninety per cent of the time he was right. Things have obviously changed enormously, because when we recorded *No.1 In Heaven* it was in a room with a bank of huge synthesisers along the walls. Now it's all possible with a computer."

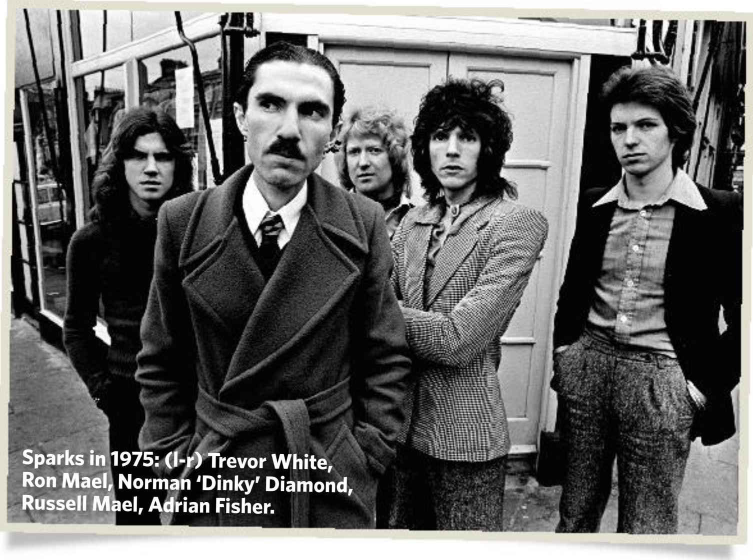
"A song can be humorous and still work on another, deeper emotional level."

Ron Mael

In many ways, Sparks pre-dated the 80s synth-pop boom. The sullen keyboard player and the vivacious lead singer was a template adopted by any number of ensuing acts – Soft Cell, Yazoo, Eurythmics, Erasure, Pet Shop Boys. But rather than milking it for all its worth, Sparks explored their own left-field version of new wave on *Terminal Jive* before forming a new iteration of the band for the rockier *Whomp That Sucker* and the avant-pop stylings of 1982's *Angst In My Pants*.

If Sparks' mission was to polarise opinion, it worked. *Angst In My Pants* addressed notions of masculinity, libido and self-image, right down to the album cover shot of a just-married Russell and Ron (the latter in a wedding dress and clutching a bouquet). And just when it seemed like Sparks had finally cracked their homeland with 1983's *In Outer Space* (featuring their biggest hit to date, *Cool Places*), the Maels chose to follow it up with the resolutely uncommercial *Pulling Rabbits Out Of A Hat*.

It was almost as if they were hellbent on self-sabotage. When the record company moaned about the lack of dance-friendly songs and refused to fund a video, Ron and Russell mugged away on ▷



Sparks in 1975: (l-r) Trevor White, Ron Mael, Norman 'Dinky' Diamond, Russell Mael, Adrian Fisher.

GETTY x2

Sparks and actress Cate Blanchett in a still from the video for *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte.*

breakfast TV with a cardboard TV screen and set about making one themselves. As a final act of petulance, they named their next album *Music That You Can Dance To*. "Most people follow the way that things should be," Ron says, "but we always have been a bit more rebellious by nature."

"Throughout Sparks' whole career we've had blinders on in a certain way, where we like to ignore what's going on," Russell elaborates. "I think that's what makes our music more pure and consistently in that Sparks world, where we don't want to tone things down. We want to be even more eccentric in that way. And that's something we're proud of never having abandoned."

This attitude has sustained Sparks throug lean periods too. Come the late 80s, no one was buying their records. But despite being without a label, the brothers continued writing tirelessly, turning their attention to a film musical of Japanese manga series *Mai, The Psychic Girl*, in tandem with director Tim Burton. The latter abandoned the project in the early 90s, leaving the Maels utterly bereft.

Bruised but not broken, they eventually recovered with 1994's punningly titled *Gratuitous Sax & Senseless Violins*. The album highlight was *When Do I Get To Sing My Way*, a satirical techno anthem that alluded to Sparks' invisibility over the past six or seven years. *'When do I get to feel like Sinatra felt?'* Russell sings in mock insolence. The need to be noticed, however, was all too real. The single proved to be a hit across Europe. In the UK it was Sparks' biggest success since *Beat The Clock* a decade and a half earlier.

Their resurgence was crowned by 2002's *Lil' Beethoven*. An audacious reinvention of the Sparks sound, forgoing beats for thrusting string arrangements and vast multi-tracked vocals, it was their finest album since *Kimono My House*. Sales took time, but critics, in both the UK the US, hailed it as a masterpiece. The Maels were truly back, and more vital than ever.

Among the various people who got back in touch was an old ally, Island Records founder Chris Blackwell.

"He'd heard *Lil' Beethoven* and just loved it," Russell recalls. "And we ended up rekindling our relationship. It wasn't a nostalgia thing, either. He really loved *The Rhythm Thief*, in particular. He said it was the kind of song that should've been a hit. When he first heard it in his car, he pulled over to the side of the road to listen: 'My God, what *is* that?'"

You know you're culturally important when the documentary makers start calling. Sparks have turned down various offers to tell their story over the years, but British filmmaker Edgar Wright was a different proposition. He wanted to lay out the full scale of the Maels' journey, from their youth in the Pacific Palisades of Los Angeles – where during the 60s they became fascinated with music, sport and Hollywood cinema – to the late-career renaissance of today.

The Sparks Brothers (2021) was a heartwarming portrait of the peaks and plains, triumphs and failures, of two of rock's good guys. An admiring army of talking heads were at hand too, their sheer diversity giving an indication of Sparks' extraordinary influence: New Order, Steve Jones, Beck, Sonic Youth, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Björk. Plus ex-bandmates, producers and collaborators, and a plethora of famous fans from the worlds of literature, TV and film. For a band often perceived as arch and a little distant, the documentary was an unusually moving experience.

"It made us see ourselves differently," says Russell. "I think Edgar did an amazing job of presenting this emotional side to the whole Sparks saga that we maybe didn't see coming. He told the history of the band in a way that treated every period equally. So there isn't one golden era, it's all part of a long process that Ron and I have been through. And this theme emerged of just being true to your own creative impulses, wherever that leads. A lot of people have really responded to that."

"We rehearsed with Mick Ronson for a week or two..."

Russell Mael

"We also realised that so many creative people from different fields – writers, film people, musicians – had been following what we were doing," Ron adds. "It was really inspiring to know that. We thought: 'God, we're actually pretty cool!'"

The release of *The Sparks Brothers* documentary crowned a recent run of critical and commercial fortune that saw the Mael brothers enjoy a run of three consecutive Top 20 albums for the first time since the mid-70s. It also coincided with Sparks' first film soundtrack, in the shape of *Annette*, a romantic musical starring Marion Cotillard and Adam Driver. For Russell and Ron – film buffs all their lives – it was the realisation of a long-held ambition.

Now, on top of *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte*, Sparks are writing and producing their own film musical, financed by the same company, Focus Features, that made the documentary. *X-Crucior* is still very much under wraps, but the brothers promise "a high-concept piece that could only really come from Sparks world. Something really unique to the whole genre of movie musicals".

There's also this summer's extensive tour of Europe, America and Japan, including two sold-out shows at London's Royal Albert Hall and the biggest headlining show of their career, at the Hollywood Bowl. Remarkably, Sparks are more active, more multi-faceted and more popular than ever. Proof that perseverance and artistic temerity are their own rewards.

"I hate to speak of legacies at this point in our lives, but we want to be relevant in a current way without besmirching what we've done in the past," offers Ron. "We're aware of keeping the quality high, but what's really inspiring to us is that we're reaching more young people now. So it just feels like a really good period for us, where we can be creative in fields beyond doing Sparks albums."

Russell agrees. "I think we're getting to have the best of both worlds," he says, smiling. "We'll never not want to make pop music, but we've loved movies throughout our whole life. In a certain sense, writing songs has been a budget way to do little films, something visual and cinematic, without needing a fifty-million-dollar budget. But now, after all this time, we're lucky enough to have both things going on simultaneously. It's really a unique situation, and so satisfying in a huge way, for a band at this stage of our career." ●

The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte is released on May 26 via Island Records. Sparks' UK tour runs from May 23 to 30.

MAIN: MUNACHI OSEGBU/PRESS

“We always fight desperately hard to move on and try new things, to be as bold as we can.”

Russell Mael

The Hot List

The essential new rock tracks you need to hear this month and the bands to have on your radar

ALYSSE GAFKJEN/PRESS

Spring is well and truly upon us (the British weather might have other ideas, but we'll let that slide), bringing with it a bounty of fresh rock to get your teeth into as new albums are announced and festival bills fill up. Every music fan's listening habits are different, but at *Classic Rock* we often find that the best songs are the ones you just *have* to listen to again and again. Binge-listening, if you will, hoping you don't get sick of whatever it is you've just fallen in love with. These days song addictions are rife in these Hot List parts, as the year's release calendar starts to look nicely busy.

We love this month's selection – some of the names you'll recognise, some are newer round here – all of which have passed the binge-listening test and, god knows how many spins later, our affections remain undiminished. Perhaps it's because rock'n'roll is such a visceral, from-the-heart affair, untethered by fashion, but there's something magic about newly discovering a song or band that you absolutely adore. It's an experience that's both totally personal and fosters a sense of community with others who feel similarly. Hopefully some of the music here sparks that in you.

For more of the good stuff every week, visit loudersound.com

Ayron Jones
Blood In The Water

Kicking off with a clean, mournful guitar line that reminded us a little of the Chili Peppers' *Under The Bridge*, *Blood In The Water* swiftly escalates into something much more crushingly moody and epic. Jones is a damn fine singer as well as a guitarist to be reckoned with, and that comes through more clearly than ever in this song's mighty choruses. His new album, *The Chronicles Of The Kid*, is coming in June, and it's definitely one we've got our eyes on.
ayronjonesmusic.com

Amy Montgomery
Change Change

Alanis Morisette and Nine Inch Nails vibes abound in this expansive new banger from Northern Irish songstress Amy Montgomery – a pounding, expansive alt.rocker that feels simultaneously dystopian and ancient in an earthy, primal sort of way. Dark, twisty and anthemic all at once. Weird and welcoming.

"Change is about realising the inevitable and in the face of uncertainty," explains Montgomery, who was raised on a diet of classic-rock staples such as AC/DC, Black Sabbath and Suzi Quatro. "It is choosing to sing an anthem of courage."

amymontgomery.me

Wytch Hazel *Angel Of Light*

Falling into a medieval pocket between Ghost and Church Of The Cosmic Skull (think juicy Thin Lizzy twin leads and Blue Öyster Cult vibes galore), this Lancashire foursome are the coolest men in tights we've encountered in some time. They might look like Jethro Tull dressed as nativity angels, but as *Angel Of Light* proves they've got the music to make the image stand tall. Forget any notions of cheesy rip-offs or *Holy Grail* hokiness, this is classy, absorbing stuff, all 70s rock, Biblical lyrics (without preaching in the slightest) and swashbuckling streaks of NWOBHM.

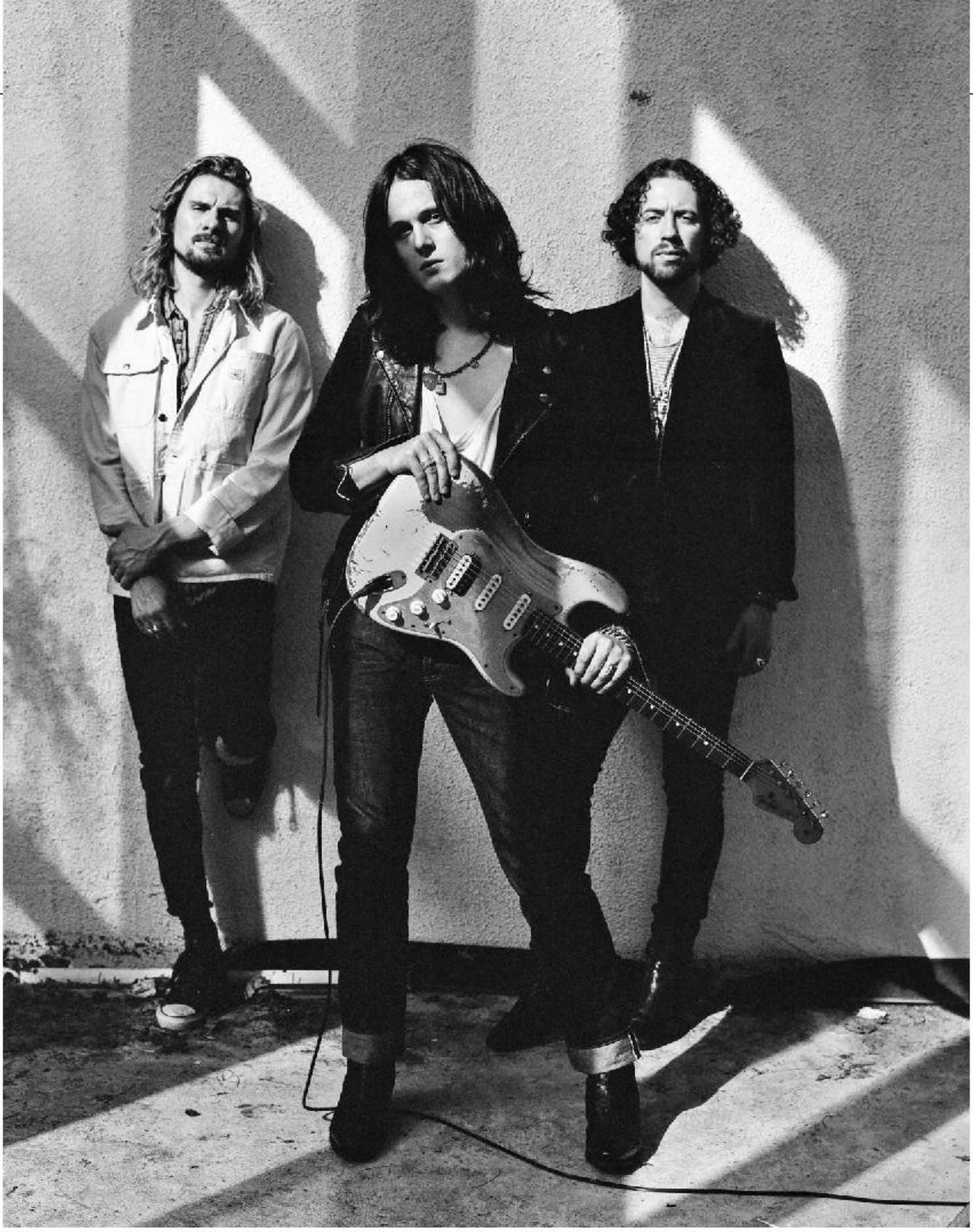
wytchhazel.bandcamp.com

WYTCH HAZEL: SAM SCOTT-HUNTER/PRESS

James And The Cold Gun
My Silhouette

Time now for some noisy homegrown rock with a side of retro punk eyeliner. We caught these guys on tour with Those Damn Crows, and they went some way to supporting their billing as 'South Wales' loudest group'. Most recently they've brought the noise with spadefuls of darkness on their stonking, smoke-filled new headbanger *My Silhouette*. It's a bit like The Damned dragging The Hives into some dark, subterranean dive joint, with drum crashes and guitars sawing like knives through shadows, and all of it set to a chorus that gets right in your chest.

jamesandthecoldgun.com



Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown
Thunder

Now a fully DIY operation – with their own indie label, Rattle Shake Records – Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown are doing things their way. In the case of *Thunder* (from new EP *Dirty Work*, their second release as an independent outfit), that means mixing the haunting Delta and bluegrass strains of their roots with the deep, heavy-set swagger of their present. Smoke and fire in just under three driving, hypnotic minutes.

"I love how we each play off of each other in *Thunder*," Bryant says. "There are actually three main guitar tracks on this song: Graham's track, my Strat track, and a resonator track. I think this song fully encompasses multiple vibes of The Shakedown: it's rootsy, it rocks and it feels good."

tylerbryantandtheshakedown.com

Snayx
Body Language

We saw this Brighton bunch live in a pub last year, after a particularly angsty few weeks. It was the perfect mental reset; roaringly good fun, complete with walk-on mash-up of filmic snake references (climaxing, naturally, with Samuel L Jackson's immortal "I've had it with these motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane!"). If Blur had had a baby with The Prodigy's Keith Flint and fed it Clash records, it might have been Snayx, as this swaggering single reflects. Snayx's new EP *Weaponized Youth: Pt 1* is out now.

snayx.com

TYLER BRYANT & THE SHAKEDOWN: ROBBY KLEIN/PRESS; SNAYX: LEILA RUMMERY/PRESS

The Bites
Squeeze

Hollywood's brightest new sparks return to The Hot List with this brilliantly executed, frills-free boogie, mixing flavours of Van Halen's *Ice Cream Man* and Jet's *Are You Gonna Be My Girl* – but faster and messier, in a good way.

"If we had to choose a song that contains all the elements of what defines The Bites as a band, the choice would be *Squeeze*," says frontman Jordan Tyler. "It's loud, packed with energy, there's sex appeal, it's chaotic…"

Whatever it is, when a band are having as much fun as this lot audibly are, you'd have to be in a very shit mood to not wind up having a good time yourself.

facebook.com/TheBitesBand

Michael Catton *Ready For The Takin'*

Formerly on vocals with Tainted Lady, Danish/English rocker Michael Catton joins forces with (Glenn Hughes guitarist) Soren Andersen on this irresistible debut solo single, originally conceived as a bedroom jam inspired by Def Leppard and Kiss records. "It's a fun rocker and holds a special place in my heart," Catton says, "representing my teenage dream of releasing my own songs that has now become a reality". It's a first-class, ultra-catchy celebration of the 80s Sunset Strip sounds that Catton clearly adores; more of which we can expect from his debut album *Point Of No Return*, out later this year.

facebook.com/michaelcattonofficial

And keep an ear out for...
The Revivalists

New Orleans collective The Revivalists are big news in the US (they've sold out enormo-site Red Rocks three times, and return there in September) but lesser known in the UK. Now, with four albums under their belt and a rather good new one – the classy, literate and life-affirming *Pour It Out Into The Night* – coming out in June, it's a good time to catch up. With new album tracks like *Kid, The Long Con* and our personal favourite *Don't Look Back*, they marry soulful ensemble sensibilities with catchy, rootsy alt.rock anthems.

Elsewhere they're busy philanthropists, working with their local after-school music program Roots Of Music, as well as organisations including The Center For Disaster Philanthropy (CDP), Everytown For Gun Safety, National Alliance On Mental Safety (NAMI), Songs For Kids Foundation, and Upturn Arts. A lot of good stuff to get behind, in other words, musically and beyond.

therevivalists.com

THE BITES: ROBERT JOHN/PRESS; THE REVIVALISTS: ALYSSE GAFKJEN/PRESS

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THE HARD STUFF
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- A Classic
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Above Average
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Ingredients:

p72 Albums
p82 Reissues
p86 DVDs & Books
p88 Buyer's Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam
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p84

The Kinks

Episode one of The Kinks' story, and it's a long way from being just the hits.

THE HARD STUFF ALBUMS

Def Leppard

Drastic Symphonies UNIVERSAL

Leppard go orchestral. You know the songs, but you've never heard them like this.

Still capable of reaching the Top 10 in the charts in both the UK and the US, Def Leppard glide along like the most stately of rock galleons. Last year's *Diamond Star Halos* album was a rip-roaring restatement of intent. And after such a great Leppard album, the question 'What next?' loomed large.

Many other bands and artists who've been making records since 1980 would cruise at this point, but, as we know, the Stakhanovites of Def Leppard are not as others. Instead they've taken a frankly unappetising detour down the orchestral route. But we needn't have worried. This being Leppard, they've done it properly, so it's the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Abbey Road, rather than some chancers in Joe's garage.

The song selection is smart, from as far back as 1981's *High'n'Dry* (the instrumental *Switch 625* almost roars) to a couple of selections from *Halos*. Of the studio albums, only *On Through The Night*, *X*, *Yeah!* and *Def Leppard* are passed over, which seems about right. Among the 16 songs there are hits – *Pour Some Sugar On Me*, *When Love & Hate Collide*, their only US No.1, *Love Bites* – but this is no 'greatest hits', hence the exhumation of some less heralded gems, such as *Kings Of The World* and *Slang* track *Love*. At first glance, then, instead it seems to be a career-spanning resumé of what might work best in this setting. So far, so ho-hum. One of the joys of the album is that it's not quite so predictable.

It turns out that what 'works best' is a moveable feast: *Drastic Symphonies* works best when there's re-invention; *Pour Some Sugar On Me* is one of several tracks for which Joe Elliott has re-done his vocals. Now, it's a snail's-paced duet with Emm Gryner (of both Leppard support act Trapper and David Bowie's band). Once lascivious – even when the band played it with Taylor Swift – Elliott and Gryner turn it inside out, and the version here is a rueful lament.

Always diligent guardians of their catalogue, Leppard are enhancing it here. Some of producer Mutt Lange's layers have been sacrificed in order to de-clutter and accommodate the orchestra, but there are additions too. There's a new guitar backdrop to the timpani-fest that is now *Animal*. And when in the third verse of *Too Late For Love* (which briefly threatens to break into *Carmina Burana*), the Joe Elliott of 2023 duets with the Joe Elliott of 1983 it's spine tingling.

It's treading water, of course. But the joy of *Drastic Symphonies* is that it doesn't sound at all like treading water.

John Aizlewood

Therapy?

Hard Cold Fire MARSHALL

As hungry and vital as ever.

You've gotta hand it to Therapy?. They are consistent in their work. Sixteen albums in and the Northern Irish rockers are still capable of producing bulldozing, bone crunching anthems.

With *Troublegum* producer Chris Sheldon at the controls once more, *Hard Cold Fire* finds Therapy? crafting a solid collection of tracks that are both brutal and melodic. Opener *They Shoot The Terrible Master* comes out of the blocks hard and fast, firing off thunderous drum licks and raging guitar riffs, while Andy Cairns wrestles with an exhausting, post-pandemic world dominated by corrupt rulers. Recent single *Joy* is a propulsive juggernaut of an anthem, as is the guitar-chugging *Two Wounded Animal*s.

Thirty-four years and 16 albums in, Therapy? still sound as vital and hungry as they did when they dropped their debut.

Damian Jones

Winger

Seven FRONTIERS MUSIC

Reanimated 80s FM rockers' comfortingly familiar return.

Unlike many of their hair-metal contemporaries, this perennially radio-friendly, fashion-agnostic quartet have kept their original line-up intact since officially re-forming their late-80s incarnation in 2006. And by now they are of course well aware of what their audience wants from them and have no need to reinvent themselves.

So despite a nine-year lay-off since 2014's *Better Days Comin'*, they might as well never have been away, judging by the heavy trucking drive of *Heaven's Falling*, *It's Okay* and *Time Bomb*, which might recognise that life ain't a party any more but suggests a big fat arena chorus can make it feel a whole lot better. The galloping melodrama of *Proud Desperado* and *Tears Of Blood* once again nod towards more adventurous pomp-rock anthemics, and the grungier *Voodoo Fire* and balladry of *Broken Glass* are effective pace breakers, but ultimately they are minor diversions from a tried and trusted path.

Johnny Sharp

Depeche Mode

Memento Mori MUTE/COLUMBIA

A post-Fletch Mode channel grief into deluxe autumnal electro-blues.

A sombre landmark for Basildon's stadium-rocking techno-pop titans, *Memento Mori* is the first Depeche Mode album without Andrew 'Fletch' Fletcher, who died suddenly last year. Recording began before Fletch's passing, so it would be fanciful to extrapolate too much from that funereal title. Mode albums typically come in 50 shades of deluxe misery, after all. But this is unquestionably an autumnal, brooding, late-career affair with a deliciously rich, echo-drenched, electro-classical production (it was co-produced by Marta Salogni, whose previous credits include Björk and M.I.A.).

While Dave Gahan and Martin Gore tap into their A-ha side on the chiming synth-pop gem *Ghosts Again*, soul-weary melancholia is their default setting on dreamy, swooping epics like *Speak to Me*. The best of Gahan's clutch of co-writing credits is *Before We Drown*, a slow-building crescendo of aching angst. Gore also surpasses himself with his mandatory solo crooning cameo, sparkly avant-lounge ballad *Soul With Me*, sounding like Scott Walker with a dash of Val Doonican. Lavish production disguises thin songwriting on a few of the tracks, but overall this voluptuous sonic feast feels like a fitting epitaph to departed friends.

Stephen Dalton

Empyre

Relentless KSCOPE

Moody rockers aim for the top.

Hailed for their atmospheric and arena-targeting sound, Empyre continue their upward career trajectory by enhancing and polishing the approach showcased on 2019 debut *Self Aware* – *Relentless* sounds bold, crisp and utterly confident in its 10 soul-searching tracks. Matching the scale of their sound to the scope of their ambition, these are vast, slick, modern rock songs shot through with angular and technical proggy stylistics, with frontman Henrik Steenholdt's gritty and soulful voice providing a vulnerable edge to the tales of introspection.

Despite the heavy-duty lyrical content, the bouncy stop-start riffing of *Road To Nowhere* and smooth 80s feel of single *Hit And Run* provide a few rays of sunshine. Otherwise the album focuses on the magnificently melancholic, with songs like *Silence Screaming*, *Parasites* and the cinematically dark *Forget Me* competing to out-emote each other.

Seriously talented and driven with it, Empyre won't be satisfied until they're arena and stadium regulars.

Essi Berelian

Ace Of Spades

Born To Booze, Live To Sin

CLEOPATRA

Motörhead tribute trio absolutely nail it.

Motörhead tribute act: three words to strike fear into the heart of any right-thinking Lemmy fan. Except this is actually pretty impressive. Featuring guitarist Neil Archer and drummer Gary 'Magpie' Bowler, Ace Of Spades were put together by ex-Hawkwind bassist Alan 'Boomer' Davey as a salute to Lemmy and the classic, grimy golden-era sound, and this show from early 2018, at the The Fleece in Bristol, sounds so authentically Motörhead it's all a bit spooky. The only difference is the vocals, which don't quite hit the same bourbon-grizzled levels as Lemmy, but that doesn't really detract from a set overflowing with late-70s/early-80s gems, including some genuinely unexpected curve-balls in *Step Down*, *Leavin' Here*, *Dirty Love* and *Limb From Limb*.

As a tribute offering, for Motörhead fans of a certain age this will probably bring a tear to the eye – in a good way.

Essi Berelian

Black Spiders

Can't Die, Won't Die

SPINEFARM

A wonder web of rock'n'roll thrills from South Yorkshire's comeback kids.

The return of Sheffield's Black Spiders in 2020 should really have been met with mass celebration, champagne corks popping (or at least a few lager cans cracking open) and whoops of delight throughout the land, because during their initial decade-long run they proved themselves to be one of the most reliably fun bands on the UK live circuit.

Wasting none of the momentum of their self-titled comeback album a couple of years ago, *Can't Die, Won't Die* is an effervescent love letter to rock'n'roll at its most joyous and uncomplicated. There's a cheeky nod to Faith No More's *Be Aggressive* on *Destroyer*, and an outbreak of shimmering, T.Rex-perfumed glam rock on *Make Me Bleed* – tasty Easter eggs hidden in among starbursts of gleaming, old-school metal riffs and timeless, feel-good hard rock attitude, tongue-in-cheek humour and a sense of togetherness that brings the boundless energy of their live shows right into the heart of the home. This is just the shot of positivity we're all crying out for.

Emma Johnston

Ana Popovic

Power ARTISTE XCLUSIVE

Broken, bluesy and back for more.

Coming out of the wreckage that was covid – an anathema to any artist who made their living by playing live – and a breast cancer diagnosis, Ana Popovic's tenth studio album was always going to come with some extra heft.

The blues and funk are self-evident, as is the bristling Fender Stratocaster, and Popovic is at her best in the pulsing *Power Over Me* and the frankly filthy *Strong Taste*, although there's plenty of room for introspection in songs like the swaying *Luv'n Touch* (which might look like a Slade tune, but it's far more syrupy than that), and *Recipe Is Romance*, which is so understated as to be almost indistinct. Popovic is much better when she's kicking chairs over and clearing the room on material like the strutting *Queen Of The Pack* and the grinding *Flicker & Flame*.

Philip Wilding

Axel Rudi Pell

The Ballads VI

STEAMHAMMER/SPV

A collection of disjointed love songs.

It's astounding to think that ever since Axel Rudi Pell released his first power ballads compilation 30 years ago, he's managed to rack up a staggering quarter of a million in album sales from the successful franchise. Often considered one of the hardest working men in metal, the Bochum guitarist's latest album comes on top of the 21 albums he's done since leaving Steeler.

Of the 13 tracks here, only five are new recordings, four of which are covers and instrumentals. The rest are recent cuts from his back catalogue. Aside from rousing new single *Morning Star* and worthy Judas Priest and Kansas retreads, *The Ballads VI* feels like it's been cobbled together with second-rate covers and bloated instrumentals.

ARP may well continue to sell records in their thousands with these compilations, but this one leaves you feeling short-changed.

Damian Jones

The Luka State

More Than This THIRTY TIGERS

Cheshire four-piece fall short on second album.

Much like the British public, the Luka State's Conrad Ellis seems to have been pulled through the coals these past couple of years. Battling addiction and mental health problems during a crippling pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, it's resulted in the Cheshire four-piece hardening their sound on latest album *More Than This*.

Backed by Biffy Clyro producer Dan Austin, Ellis's fury at the state of the nation is borne out in all its vented glory across this record. On songs like the vitriolic *Bring Us Down* and the defiant title track, the frontman angrily channels his fire with aplomb. But it boils over abysmally towards the end of *Oxygen Thief*, in which Ellis delivers an almost comical outburst.

The Luka State's heart is in the right place on this record, but overall it doesn't quite pack the punch it initially threatened to.

Damian Jones

ROUND-UP: SLEAZE

By Sleazegrinder

Moron's Morons: head-ripping stuff.

Moron's Morons

High-Tension Situation

SWEET TIME

Second album from Warsaw's favourite human wrecks. If you have not had the pain or pleasure of experiencing Moron's Morons' particular brand of satanic sleaze-punk prior to this moment, imagine The Mummies with even worse attitudes, or maybe The Dwarves after a stint in maximum-security prison. I mean, you should probably expect it given the album title, but the album really is a throbbing mess of raw nerves. It's a panic button smashed with a claw hammer, the sound of homicidal plague rats jumping ship into a roiling sea of black blood. But don't worry, you can still dance to it. Tracks like *Knife to Your Throat*, *Fueled By Hate* and *Possessed To Fuck* walk it like they talk it: fast, fucked and furious. There's a couple of nods to snotty '77 punk, and *She's My Adrenaline* sorta sounds like the Only Ones, but the rest of the time they are only interested in ripping your head off and slurping soup out of your skull.

Glitter Wizard

Kiss The Boot SELF-RELEASED

Last time I laid my ears on Glitter Wizard, they were psychedelic cavemen wrestling Stooges riffs into submission. However, somewhere along the way they smacked headfirst into a boogie wonderland of high-heeled sneakers and feather boas, and so we have *Kiss The Boot*, their arena-rocking ode to 70s glam. It's still pleasantly Neanderthal, though.

Pink Leather Jackets

Keep That Shit To Yourself

SELF-RELEASED

Canadian creeps playing hook-heavy, scream-along punk rock somewhere between the Black Halos and Hardcore Superstar. This is some addictive shit. There's been a lot of songs titled *Rock N Roll Is Dead*, but I'm pretty sure this is the first one that blames giant killer robots.

Plagiarizer

Light It Up SELF-RELEASED

Gloriously swaggering heavy metal rock'n'roll from Seattle. Hard to describe, but if the 80s were the 70s, these fuckers would be the kings of Metal Mountain. As it is we've got massive piles of riffs raining down like flaming arrows, thwopping meat-hammer drums, and lyrics about the devil and women and devil women. Trust me, it's a total rocker.

The Suckos

Love Songs For Jerks

SELF-RELEASED

There might be just one person in the world impressed by a Motorcycle Boy cover, and that person is me. On here the LA riff 'n' rollers bang out a bass-rattling, Motörhead-y cover of MB's classic *Feel It*, but even without that tasty treat this record would've scored high marks for their aggressive, sleazy garage-punk assault on everything.

HARD STUFF ALBUMS

TIMO JÄGER/PRESS

The Damned

Darkadelic EARMUSIC

Loud'n'lively twelfth from punk's most adaptable survivors.

'It's always been a great adventure for so many years'* Captain Sensible sings on *Bad Weather Girl*, two tracks into *Darkadelic*. The song is ostensibly about the unpredictable climate through which The Damned have traversed these isles over the past five decades, but it could also be taken as a measure of their sheer staying power. They've endured, and flourished, when most of their punk peers have long-since withered.

The original Damned line-up reunited for some shows at the end of 2022, playing together for the first time in 20-odd years. That's where the nostalgia ends, though. The new-look Damned – original members Dave Vanian and the Captain, plus long-time ally Paul Gray on bass, keyboard player Monty Oxymoron and new drummer Will Glanville-Taylor – already had *Darkadelic* in the can by closing night, squaring up to the future just as they drew a line under the past.

Darkadelic is no dramatic reinvention – this is most certainly a Damned record – yet it carries enough fire and youthful zest to suggest fresh purpose. It certainly rocks harder than 2018 predecessor *Evil Spirits*. At the same time, naturally, it carries echoes of the band's catalogue, particularly the early-80s transition from post-punk subversion to gothy psychedelia. Nothing encapsulates this better than *Wake The Dead*, which enters like a seditious take on Alice Cooper's *Elected* and exits via a series of swirling passages that reference burning candles, spectral weddings and the hidden veil between worlds. The idea, in the band's own words, is "to give the fans a fucking killer song if they need one for a funeral".

Western Promise is suffused with the same urgent drama. A baleful love song with a sad-sounding trumpet break and a great organ solo, it's a charged hymn to wanderlust and togetherness in the face of tempest and storm. *'Fortune favours the brave as we seize the day,'* Vanian asserts, in one of his most measured vocal performances. The moonlit *Roderick* feels like a lost blood brother of 1980's *Curtain Call*, a semi-symphonic piece with piano, brass, Latin choir and allusions to Edgar Allan Poe.

Mostly, though, *Darkadelic* is fairly breathless stuff. Sensible is both savage and articulate on guitar, be it the Stooges-like blowout *Follow Me*, a merciless takedown of celebrity culture, or the ferocious *Leader Of The Gang*, a thinly veiled account of Gary Glitter's fall from grace.

All told, *Darkadelic* is a vital and reassuringly pugnacious return.

Rob Hughes

Rickie Lee Jones

Pieces Of Treasure

BMG MODERN

Sophisticated late-night jazz, slow and luxurious.

Rickie Lee Jones's voice is smooth, expressive and shot through with experience and emotion, able to invest well-worn American-songbook classics such as *Just In Time* and *September Song* with fresh layers of meaning, with just a walking bass, sparse piano and vibraphone for back-up. It sounds effortless, natural, in a way that Chet Baker or Frank Sinatra once did, and probably is – you can't fake this.

"The Duchess of Coolsville", brags the cover, and it's a reasonable boast. On a slowed-down *On The Sunny Side Of The Street*, Jones sounds playful and worldly-wise and young beyond her years, like she's living every moment of the song the way only the truly great or truly naïve singers can.

As she writes in the sleeve-notes: "I am younger now than I was last winter."

Magical.

Everett True

Devildriver

Dealing With Demons II

NAPALM

Groove-metal stalwarts, back in rude health.

Recent reports suggest that we nearly lost Devildriver frontman Dez Fafara to covid not so long ago. Not that you can tell from *Dealing With Demons II*, which is as vicious and vital as anything in the band's catalogue.

The first fruits of a newly rejigged line-up, returning original bassist Jon Miller included, these nine songs offer an uncompromising counterpart to 2020's moodier, more dynamic *Dealing With Demons I*.

With strong echoes of previous peaks of heaviness like 2011's *Beast*, songs like the witch-friendly *Mantra* and the cudgelling groove-riot of *Bloodbath* will prove lethally effective as future circle-pit fodder, while the more grandiose, gothic likes of *Through The Depths* and steely-eyed brush-off *This Relationship, Broken* show how Devildriver are mutating anew. This is Fafara's strongest set of lyrics yet, too. In particular, *If Blood Is Life* is a deeply affecting hymn to staring death in the face and roaring with defiance. Seems apt.

Dom Lawson

Dave Lombardo

Rites Of Percussion IPECAC

Beat on the brat.

Not only is Dave Lombardo the king of metal drummers, he's also one of the busiest. In a 40-year career since co-founding Slayer he has played with many other bands including Testament, Suicidal Tendencies, Dead Cross and Annihilator, plus dozens more side projects from John Zorn to Metallica, proving that his skills are widely transferable. He also has the knack of lighting up every band he plays with, which tends to distract from his somewhat restless nature.

Now, he has finally got round to releasing a solo album that, shorn of other musicians, lays out clearly, in 13 stand-alone drum breaks, accompanied only by the occasional droning note, what Lombardo brings to the drum party. The album reveals that it's the breadth of his influences – Latin as well as Led Zeppelin – that accounts for his own style. But you will need to be a drum fan.

Hugh Fielder

Dropkick Murphys

Okemah Rising

DUMMY LUCK MUSIC

Celtic punks channel the spirit of Woody Guthrie once more.

Although technically an acoustic album, *Okemah Rising* is more likely to smash a rocking chair into firewood than sit on one. As on last year's *This Machine Still Kills Fascists*, it showcases Dropkick Murphys rocking their way around previously unpublished writings by Woody Guthrie, socialist singer-songwriter touchstone for everyone from Dylan to Strummer.

The titular Okemah is the Oklahoma birthplace of Guthrie, and this second volume of kinship with its most famous son was recorded (at the same time as the predecessor) upstate in Tulsa. Ken Casey sings every line with passion, making each as relevant today as in the times that inspired them – witness *Gotta Get To Peekskill* (featuring Violent

Femmes) referencing the American Civil Rights movement and riots of 1949, or *Run Hitler Run*. Good ideas stand the test of time and, alongside a new version of the band's biggest hit, *Shipping Up To Boston*, they make *Okemah Rising* irresistible and incendiary.

Neil Jeffries

Shakin' Stevens
Re-Set BMG

We're not in this ol' house any more.

Now hurtling towards his 80th birthday, singer Shakin' Stevens – who, lest we forget, regularly played Communist Party benefits in his early days – is undergoing a remarkable renaissance in the winter of his career.

Echoes Of Our Times (2016) was a distinctly British take on Americana. On new album *Re-Set* he's more sparse still. Guitars twang (*May*, a tribute to his mother, glides like the *Twin Peaks* theme); *George* is done with just voice and piano; *Tick Tock* grapples with climate change; *Dirty Water* channels Tom Petty. Perhaps best of all, the angry, hoarse-voiced *Beyond The Illusion* links the forced emigration of 18th-century Cornish miners with contemporary refugee displacement. It wouldn't be out of place on a Levellers album.

It's a mystery why he's waited so long to blossom; the Top 10 hits began to dry up after 1985's *Merry Christmas Everyone*. If only he'd taken this direction then.

John Aizlewood

The Church
The Hypnogogue EASY ACTION

Cure-loved Australian goths still vibrant after 40-plus years.

The Hypnogogue is the twenty-sixth album from Sydney goths The Church, still best-known for either *The Unguarded Moment* back in 1981 or their near-hit *Under The Milky Way* eight years later. Along the way, leader and sole constant Steve Kilbey, has tussled with heroin, written poetry and painted as well as running The Church and having a solo career.

The Hypnogogue finds him close to the top of his game. As ever, his vocals are way back in the mix, but beyond the noodly *Succulent* his tendency to embrace meandering murkiness has been cast aside in favour of hypnotic throb on the standout *Thorn*, or a covert near-pop pulse on atmospheric opener *Ascendence*, while *Aerodrome* is unusually gentle and none the worse for it.

The best bands have the capacity to surprise even after decades at the coal face. That The Church remain so vigorous and vibrant is a delightful surprise indeed.

John Aizlewood

Hawkwind
The Future Never Waits
CHERRY RED

Space rockers' purple patch continues on studio album number 35.

With the global pandemic and government-sanctioned lockdowns that prompted them to record 2020's *Carnivorous* (as Hawkwind Light Orchestra) and the following year's *Somnia* via a process of file sharing and sheer doggedness behind them, space-rock pioneers Hawkwind are finally back together in the bucolic environs of leader Dave Brock's studio on his Devonshire farm. And the difference is palpable – this album feels like musicians bouncing ideas off of each other in the same room.

The central conceit here is that of mortality. And while that might seem simple enough, the band start with death and work backwards across two slabs of vinyl (or 10 CD tracks) to the wonderment of birth. Among the characteristic chugging rock of *Rama (The Prophecy)* and *The End* are three instrumentals that find Hawkwind stretching out.

Pick of the triptych is creamy opener *The Future Never Waits*, which bathes in electronic washes, with the surging psychedelia of *USB 1* not far behind. Elsewhere, their dystopian sci-fi occupations remain on *The Beginning*.

Make no mistake, their space ritual is still in progress.

Julian Marszalek

Twisted Illusion
Upstairs To Optimism

Manchester metallers' winning fourth album is another, ahem, step up.

Ten years and four records in, Manchester quintet Twisted Illusion continue to make fun, uplifting twin-guitar metal spiked with a shot of prog. *Upstairs To Optimisim* is their lockdown album, and the larky video for crunchy, harmony-steeped single *Totality* sums up that whole bog roll-hoarding nightmare with a grin.

Rush, The Darkness, Dio and Dragonforce all come to mind as singer/guitarist Matt Jones belts out massive, high-vocal sections with elan (punk-poppy opener *Analyse And Incentivise*). He's got best-pal chemistry with fellow guitarist Saxon Davids (the catchy *Gone Tomorrow (Crash Bandicoot's Lament)* is puerile *and* great), and on the sweet 'n' sad *We Tried To Make It* and quirky acoustic lull *Tired* Twisted Illusion even speak Todd Rundgren's forked harmonic language.

Another excellent record.

Grant Moon

Neal Smith
KillSmith Goes West
CLEOPATRA

Mercurial drummer takes a turn as outlaw country rocker.

Former Alice Cooper drummer Neal Smith remains busy – this is his seventh 'solo' release since 1999 including three, branded KillSmith, ranging from industrial to pop. This time, singing all 10 originals, Smith goes country. Mostly.

It starts out plaintively on *Shaughnessy Highway*, goes full honky-tonk on *Big Wheels*, then on others – including the excellent *Sunsets Of Gold* – boasts fiddle by Nashville stalwart Gary Oleyar. But Smith reverts to type on *Pull It Out Smokin* (a metallic boogie), *Jesus Was A Gunfighter* (more Rose Tattoo than Hank Williams), and *Tattooed Cowgirl* (with slide guitar by Stu Daye, alongside Smith on *Muscle Of Love* in 1973).

Goes West is fun, though, thanks to lyrics as wry as Alice and Smith's ex-Blue Öyster Cult buddy Joe Bouchard.

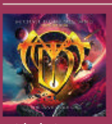
Neil Jeffries

ROUND-UP: MELODIC ROCK

By Dave Ling

Michael Thompson Band: enveloping the listener like a warm embrace.

Michael Thompson Band (Featuring Moon Calhoun)
The Love Goes On FRONTIERS



Back in 1989 the Michael Thompson Band set new standards in West Coast-flavoured AOR with their super-smooth debut album *How Long*. With backing harmonies from John Elefante (Kansas) and Bobby Kimball (Toto), the vocal contribution of Moon Calhoun was every bit as crucial as that of Michael Thompson, the group's session guitarist namesake.

Despite being released by Geffen, *How Long* fell by the wayside. Fans had to wait until 2012 for a MTB reunion with *Future Past*, which was without Calhoun.

As the expanded credit confirms, *The Love Goes On* was made in conjunction with the Moon (geddit?), and is all the better for it. Right from the off the album finds its leisurely paced groove via a velvety title track, the sincere immediacy of *Whispers And Dreams*, *War Of The Heart* and the delicious *What Keeps You Alive* enveloping the listener like the comfortable, familiar embrace of a long lost friend.

Failure to buy this record is Lunar-cy.

Heavens Edge
Get It Right FRONTIERS

Lady luck has treated Heavens Edge pretty despicably. During the 90s their bassist George 'GG' Guidotti was injured in an indiscriminate shooting during a concert by the Philly band, and died from lung cancer in 2019, six years after a comeback at the Firefest. The band's first studio album in a quarter of a century is slick, tuneful and very hummable. GG would be proud.

First Light
Gravity

This independently released mini-album marks the beginnings of a group so smitten by the kingpins of AOR – Journey, Foreigner, Giant and FM – that they headhunted the original keyboard player of the latter group.

Despite a couple of mild misfires among its eight tracks, *Rise And Fall*, *Crossfire* and the euphoric *This Is It* all suggest some real fireworks ahead.

Bite The Bullet
Rocky Road ESCAPE MUSIC

Having been dormant for three decades, Bite The Bullet are back with a fourth album of quaint Mr Mister/Toto-esque politeness. With original guitarist Malcolm Jones back in the fold since last year's *End Of The Line*, the quintet continue to make music that for the most part is warm and inviting, although at its low points just a wee bit too anodyne.

Mecca
Everlasting FRONTIERS

Now more than two decades old, the self-titled debut from Mecca is regarded as a bit of a genre classic. A vehicle for Joseph Vana, who sang on demos for Survivor's Jim Peterik, *Everlasting* welds a laid-back sweetness to traditional AOR themes. Written largely by its producer Alessandro Del Vecchio, this fourth album hits the spot more often than it misses.

Ian Hunter

Defiance Part 1 SUN

One of Britain's great songwriters delivers a shining example of his craft.

'*When I was thirty I was over the hill/Fifty years later I still kill,*' Ian Hunter sings on *This Is What I'm Here For*. The fact that the last track on Ian Hunter's new album is a rock-hard mission statement says a lot about Ian Hunter. *Defiance Pt 1* (great name) may be Hunter's eighteenth or so album (not counting his records with Mott The Hoople), but in its speed, its swing, its songs and its attitude it's more like a debut. Even the presence of a line-up of ridiculously famous star names, normally a bad sign (superstar contributors tend to act like a dead weight on albums, rather than a lift) doesn't detract from the sheer Ian Hunter-ness of *Defiance*. Celebrity pals including Ringo Starr, Todd Rundgren, Slash and the late Taylor Hawkins all lend their talents, but none of them overwhelm the songs or come anywhere near to standing in Hunter's light. Part of this must be down to his regular collaborators The Rant Band, led by longtime conspirator Andy York, who rock and swing like anything throughout, and by now can anticipate their boss's every demand. Part of it must also be the respect for Hunter, who has defied the laws of space and time all his life. But most of this album's sheer chutzpah and balls is down to Hunter, who has made seemingly not giving a fuck part of his personal mission statement since 1969.

The songs are great. From the title track that's as metal as Hunter gets (that'll be Slash) and is a classic Hunter boast ('*Got an F for giving too much lip/Got an F for being tragic and hip*'), to the single *Bed Of Roses*, about playing Hamburg's Star Club and features, aptly enough, Ringo on drums, this is a collection of brilliant, swinging rockers. There are harmonies from Rundgren on the majestically Dylanesque *Don't Tread On Me*, there's a track featuring, impossibly, Taylor Hawkins, Billy Bob Thornton and Billy Gibbons, and there is the epic *Angel*, a ballad as good as anything Hunter has ever done, with the haunting line: '*When we move, I hope we go to your place.*' Nobody but Hunter has the power, at this point in their career, to sound so fresh, so new and so exciting.

'*When I'm through, I'll notify you,*' he sings on *This Is What I'm Here For*. We better believe it.

David Quantick

Glen Matlock

Consequences Coming

COOKING VINYL

Passionate pop polemic from former Sex Pistols bassist.

'*I gotta get this out there!*' Glen Matlock sings on stirring opener *Head On A Stick*, and the album almost brims over with rage at a world seemingly gone mad in the wake of Brexit and Trump's election. Not that the debonair Matlock – currently moonlighting as touring bassist with Blondie – ever loses sight of the need for a melodic counterpoint to such righteous fury. *Speaking In Tongues* is a bluesy broadside at political double-speak, while the title track is a propulsive musical told-you-so in which he announces: '*You ain't ever gonna cramp my style.*'

Elsewhere, *This Empty Heart, Can't Be Myself With You* and a heartfelt cover of KD Lang's *Constant Craving* suggest severe emotional turbulence, too, culminating in cathartic finale *This Ship*, where he declares: '*This train is rolling down the track.*'

In a world of ersatz entertainment, Matlock is a rock'n'roll troubadour to the end.

Paul Moody

Cradle Of Filth

Trouble And Their Double Lives NAPALM

Fiery snapshot of 21st-century Ipswich-craft.

Twenty-one years have passed between the release of Cradle Of Filth's first live album and this, their avowedly opulent second. *Trouble And Their Double Lives* captures Dani Filth and his carnivorous comrades at various points along the road between 2014 and 2019. Aside from showcasing what is easily the best (and most ferocious) line-up ever assembled under the Filth banner, it provides a vigorous plunge into their now bountiful back catalogue, with an equal emphasis on deep cuts and highlights from recent albums *Hammer Of The Witches* and *Cryptoriana – The Seductiveness Of Decay*. It's a blood-spattered riot from start to finish, with a tumultuous *Bathory Aria* and a laudably obnoxious *Gilded Cunt* its dramatic peaks. Two brand-new studio tracks complete the deal: *Demon Prince Regent* is grim, gothic and deliciously overwrought, while *She Is A Fire* is the sharpest, catchiest tune Cradle have written in years.

Dom Lawson

Angel

Once Upon A Time CLEOPATRA

Angels with tarty faces.

It's one of life's greatest tragedies that American glam-pop-pomp legends Angel never got around to playing the UK in their 1970s heyday. This writer remembers dressing in his best white satin suit and travelling miles to the only cinema in the country that was showing the forgettable film *Foxes*, just to witness Angel's blink-and-you'll-miss-it cameo.

Still including original frontman Frank DiMino (in remarkably good operatic voice) and guitarist Punky Meadows, the band's latest comeback is a little slice of heaven. Each of the 11 tracks (14 if you buy the CD) is a doozie, special mentions going to *Blood Of My Blood, Bone Of My Bone*, a classic teen-teeze ballad, the immense swirling dramatics of *Psyclone*, and the menacing nursery rhyme *Once Upon A Time An Angel And A Devil Fell In Love (And It Did Not End Well)*, replete with demonic growls and Jane Birkin-style orgasms.

No Gregg Giuffria, but you can't have everything.

Geoff Barton

Tygers Of Pan Tang

Bloodlines MIGHTY MUSIC

Cat's not got the cream.

The time has likely come to delete 'NWOBHM legends' as a prelude to any mentioning of Tygers Of Pan Tang. *Bloodlines* is halfway decent, but it could have been recorded by any bog-average Euro-metal mob. Put brutally, this is the sound of the band's founding guitarist Robb Weir dithering about with an assortment of unmemorable sidemen; the red-raw appeal of the Tygers' early-doors, Jess Cox-fronted line-up is now a very distant memory. Which of course it is.

Problem is, it's difficult to identify a signature Tygers sound, particularly as they went all AOR on us at one point. The best tracks here have most in

ROSS HALFIN/PRESS

common with UFO, notably evocative closer *Making All The Rules*, with its Mogg-reminiscent lyrics. The riotous 'n' raunchy *Back For Good* is a standout of sorts; you can genuinely detect a whiff of NWOBHM fever. But when one starts scribbling notes like "nothing to dislike here" you know you're in trouble.

Geoff Barton

Texas Hippie Coalition

The Name Lives On

MNRK HEAVY

Southern-fried heavy metal packs quite the punch.

Often overlooked in the grand lineage of southern rockers, Texas Hippie Coalition might look like the kind of people you'd think twice about lending your car to, but this seventh studio album makes enough of the right noises to make you forget about any extra points on your licence you might accrue.

Swaggering in like Corrosion Of Conformity and Down once did – you imagine they'd clear a bar pretty quickly – *The Name Lives On* is all elbows and self-belief. It's punchy and ornery but packed with enough good tunes to keep you sticking around, especially the curve-ball moment in songs like *Hard Habit* and *I Teach Angels How To Fly*, where even they take their foot off the gas momentarily. Otherwise it's gloriously roughshod – *Hell Hounds*, *Scream* – driven hard and fast until they're out of sight.

Philip Wilding

The Mars Volta

Que Dios Te Maldiga Mi Corazon

CLOUDS HILL

Musical shape shifters continue doing what they do best.

When the Mars Volta made their comeback last year with their first album in a decade, few would have expected them to take a plunge into pop. Owing debts to Prince, MGMT and Hall & Oates, the Texan duo's self-titled funk-driven album was a far cry from their fiery prog-punk roots.

With *Que Dios Te Maldiga Mi Corazon*, Cedric Bixler-Zavala and Omar Rodríguez-López have gone one step further, reconstructing the record into an acoustic "folk album", which swaps funk for Latin beats. On *Blank Condolences*, for example, they've stripped the single of its swirling guitars and replaced them with a cacophony of soothing percussion instruments. It's a trick that works just as effectively on slowed-down, hammock-swaying takes of *Blacklight Shine* and *Graveyard Love*.

While this album isn't quite as impressive as the record in its original guise, it's still an interesting shift in gears by the Mars Volta.

Damian Jones

Deathstars

Everything Destroys You

NUCLEAR BLAST

Swedish machine-rockers still sinister after all these years.

Industro-glam slammers Deathstars haven't released an album in eight years, and there's always the possibility that the world has moved on. After all, this is a band based entirely on sex orgies, street drugs and old Marilyn Manson records. Is any of that relevant in an era of doomscrolling, cancel culture and Greta Von Fleet? Sure, it turns out.

While they haven't strayed far from their halcyon *Termination Bliss* days, the meaty electro-beats still hit hard, the slinky guitars are flapping black wings of B-movie horror, and Andreas Burgh's bassy bellow still scratches that deep-dark Eldritch/Murphy/Steele itch. And most of the songs are about the end of the world, which is entirely relatable. The title track is the album's centerpiece, a sprawling epic of swirling synths and Rammstein-ish military might, but more singular thrills abound in the symphonic Skinny Puppyisms of *The Infrahuman Masterpiece* and the delightfully debauched death rally of *Midnight Party*.

Sleazegrinder

The Hip Priests

Roden House Blues

THE SIGN

Nottingham punk'n'rollers get a new sonic sheen.

While any semblance of originality continues to elude them – this is a band that fully buys into the notion that punk is most definitely a genre rather than an attitude – Nottingham's the Hip Priests are to be congratulated for having just delivered their best-recorded, produced and melodic album to date.

So while the one-paced nature of *Roden House Blues* means that one supercharged track blurs into another without being given the space to breathe or establish its own identity, the album does contain moments that elevate it above their previous releases.

The timely *Just To Get Back* is a hot splash of righteous piss'n'vinegar that's built on breathless riffing and bursts of rock'n'roll lead bursts. Elsewhere, *Persistence Is Futile* and *Pissed On Power* follow in the same vein thanks to air-punching choruses played at breakneck speed and Nathan Von Cruz's breathless vocal delivery, but some much-needed texture wouldn't go amiss.

Julian Marszalek

Quiz Show

Quiz Show

MAGIC DOOR

Punk-inspired alternative rock descended from Shudder To Think.

Appreciation for this first full-length release by New Jersey three-piece Quiz Show rests on a love for Pixies, Hüsker Dü and, perhaps, Joy Division. Still reading? Good.

Quiz Show the album is actually a collection of singles the band recorded between 2017 and 2020. Since then they've issued two three-track EPs of newer material. Chris Matthews (guitar, vocals) and Kevin March (drums, vocals) – moonlighting from Guided By Voices – last worked together 25 years ago in Washington DC's Shudder To Think.

In places the vocals are a bit Pete Shelley (and not in a good way), but the 12 tracks rattle along in a lively post-punk alternative vein. The best is *Dime A Dozen*, and other highlights include *Sound Of Kissing*, *What If?*, *Withstand*, a brilliantly sneery *Pom Pom Boy* and *Almost Famous* in which the guitar sound could chip paint off a battleship.

Neil Jeffries

ROUND-UP: **BLUES**

By Henry Yates

JAY BLAKESBERG/PRESS

Taj Mahal: a covers album saluting jazz-blues standards.

Taj Mahal

Savoy

STONY PLAIN

Now in his eighties, perhaps it's understandable that Taj Mahal's recent projects feel like entries struck off a bucket list. Having reunited with Ry Cooder on last year's *Get On Board*, *Savoy* fulfils another decades-held dream: to salute the jazz-blues standards that filled the dancefloor at Harlem's Savoy Ballroom between the 1920s and 50s (the storied venue has personal significance, the New Yorker reminds us on the spoken-word intro to *Stompin' At The Savoy*, as the place where his parents first met).

A covers album initially seems disappointing for a man who has torn down and rebuilt the blues more than once in his career. But Mahal's song choices are impeccable and his players beyond top-notch; the sweet and sour of the brushed drums and Evan Price's violin is potent, while producer/pianist John Simon has a stunning wee-small-hours touch. But it's the veteran's session, and with that stentorian voice *Sweet Georgia Brown* and *I'm Just A Lucky So And So* are highlights that warm any room you play them in.

Marc Broussard

S.O.S. 4: Blues For Your Soul

KTBA

Long-regarded as the king of bayou soul, you always sensed that Marc Broussard's voice would sound incredible nudged a little further towards the blues. So it proves, with co-producer Joe Bonamassa encouraging Broussard to run riot across the songbooks of Little Milton, Howlin' Wolf and more, the best being *I'd Rather Drink Muddy Water*.

Chris Duarte

Ain't Giving Up

PROVOGUE

Dubbed 'punk blues' for a ferocious guitar style that often leads to a bloodied fretboard at gigs, Chris Duarte broke through with 1994's *Texas Sugar/Strat Magik*, and his reunion after 22 years with that album's producer Dennis Herring bears more arse-rough but thrilling fruit. Tracked live and with no overdubs, it sounds like there was blood on tracks like *Nobody But You*.

Fred Davis

Cleveland Blues

COLEMINE

Fred Davis's shooting in 1988 ensured the world never knew his name. But the efforts of Eli 'Paperboy' Reed (who regularly found the guitarist performing in his living room as the guest of his father) might yet change that. On this album, rescued from the attic, there's a little of JB Lenoir in Davis's high vocal and a lot of T-Bone Walker in his guitar style. It's the real deal.

Johnny Mars & The Cold Heart Revue

The Reunion

SELF-RELEASED

Back in the 90s, when American harmonica ace Johnny Mars visited David Robinson's primary school in Portsmouth, it started the nine-year-old's journey to become one of the UK scene's cult treasures as The Cold Heart Revue. Now recording on a more level pegging, the pair have a fantastic push and pull on this great album.

THE HARD STUFF
ALBUMS

Jethro Tull

RökFlöte INSIDE OUT

Songs from the Norse.

From Christianity to paganism – the Tull revival continues. Just as it seemed that Jethro Tull were fizzling out amid a welter of live albums, orchestral albums and anniversary reissues, not to mention Ian Anderson solo albums (confusingly using the same musicians) that picked at the bones of Tull's past, the band have been reborn as a viable contemporary outfit.

Their 2022 album *The Zealot Gene*, themed around verses from the *Bible*, restored Jethro Tull to the UK Top 10 album chart for the first time since *Thick As A Brick* back in '72. Now, just over a year later, Tull are back with *RökFlöte* which has forsaken the Bible in favour of the paganism of Norse mythology, a more popular rock'n'roll inspiration that has given rise to a whole musical genre.

But anyone expecting a death metal album from Jethro Tull is going to be disappointed. Ian Anderson is more interested in the characters and the cruelty that proliferate amid the myths and sagas of the Norse lands than in the comic-book manifestations that the subtlety-free death metal bands suck up so eagerly.

What's surprising is that Anderson can kick up more menace with his flute than any number of hoarse roaring voices and thrashing guitars. *RökFlöte* opens – and closes – with some metal-sounding flute feedback that makes for a chilling atmosphere. On the opening *Voluspo*, that's followed by a ponderous theme to underscore the portentous implications of the prophecy that lies at the heart of Norse mythology.

Anderson introduces the family of Nordic gods – including the one-eyed Odin and his son Thor whose murderous exploits make up the various sagas – with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of themes and melodies that are every bit as descriptive as his lyrics. And his flute playing has reached a maturity that enables him to capture the complexity he uncovers in Thor's character, on *Hammer On Hammer*, while also making a lyrical allusion to Putin. Likewise the howl he produces on his flute at the beginning of *Wolf Unchained* is more effective than the real thing, hinting at the carnal power that makes the image of the wolf so disturbing.

The music lightens up when Anderson moves on to the sagas themselves, but the intricacies remain. As do the idiosyncratic allusions – such as the Mae West flotation jackets worn by the pilots who protected Britain during World War Two that crop up in *Guardian's Watch*, a song about those who protect the gods.

Hugh Fielder

Arielle

'73 SELF-RELEASED

Erstwhile guitar prodigy softens up the retro stylings.

Since emerging in the early 2010s as a guitar whizz with a formidable voice and skills endorsed by the likes of Brian May and Vince Gill, American Arielle has carved out an artistic persona revolving around her passion for vintage gear and old-school aesthetics.

However, the quirky lyrical approach she employed on last year's *Analog Girl In A Digital World* is noticeably toned down on *'73* in favour of broader strokes, as on the sweet country-pop balladry of *Goes Without Sayin'* and *The Way You Look At Me*, or the boogie-informed ZZ Top-lite touches of *Somewhere Slow* and the title track.

Yet while there are some neatly turned tunes on this album, the rather safe-sounding production is more in keeping with the 80s trend of airbrushing raw talent into slick commercial packaging than with the gritty southern-rock lineage the title would like to suggest allegiance to.

Johnny Sharp

Richie Ramone

Live To Tell LIVEWIRE/CARGO

Temporary Ramones drummer's third solo album keeping the dream alive.

Drummer Richard 'Richie Ramone' Reinhardt filled in for Marky Ramone for three mid-80s Ramones studio albums – *Too Tough To Die, Animal Boy, Halfway To Sanity* – while Marky took a sabbatical to get sober. Acknowledged by Joey as having saved the band during an especially fractious period, Richie eventually left the band following financial disagreements with Johnny.

Live To Tell isn't remaking that Ramones-inflected punk-rock template. The Joey Ramone-meets-Billy Idol vocals are typical of that period when the Ramones lost their rudimentary urgency due to over-production but attracted more rock fans thanks to the polished sound. That's where Richie came in, and likewise he's at his best here with the dark-tinged up-tempo snarl and harmonic 'ooh-ahh's of *Who Stole My Wig* and *Suffocate*, the caffeinated beats reminiscent of his work on stone-cold classic *My Brain Is Hanging Upside Down (Bonzo Goes To Bitburg)*. Includes a slow-burn cover of Gerard McMahon's *Cry Little Sister* from *The Lost Boys* soundtrack.

Alex Burrows

Enter Shikari

A Kiss For The Whole World SO RECORDINGS

Post-pandemic chest beating from still questing electro-rockers.

Still the lockdown albums come. Enter Shikari's is one of the brightest yet, relishing the emancipation era with a global hug of a title track – all fanfare horns and crisp, melodic hardcore, the arena-sized Mario Kart tune about rekindling the flame of live music, and defiant electro-rockers like *Jailbreak*: *'I won't be held captive, even when my mind is a prison cell.'* Events somewhat supersede singer Rou Reynold's usual political ire, but on *Bloodshot* he does reserve some ballad-metal rancour for social-media hatemongers and filter-fakers. Meanwhile, the sonic mashings of 2020's *Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible* continue, as *It Hurts* images an industrial-metal Depeche Mode, *Leap Into The Lightning* a Coldplay with rabies, and *Dead Wood*, with its baroque strings, vocodered vocals and awkward waltz, an AI writing *Eleanor Rigby* in the style of Biffy Clyro. A smacker.

Mark Beaumont

69 Eyes

Death Of Darkness ATOMIC FIRE

Let's do the Transylvania Twist (again).

A full year ago, 69 Eyes unleashed the exquisite neon banger *Drive*, hinting at a slinky new era for the forever-leather Finns, a canyon crawling vampire-in-sunlight sound that freely soaked up the grandeur and decadence of old Hollywood. Now, a whole album's worth of the dark, sticky stuff.

Jyrki's arch-fiend croon is in fine form as he narrates the band's twisted fantasies of endless nights and lips of blood, and their sleaze-goth crunch has never hit harder. *Gotta Rock* is throbbing, New Romantic

ASSUNTA OPHAL/PRESS

synth-pop with a vampire twist; *Call Me Snake* is one of their many nerdy-but-cool B-movie homages; *This Murder Takes Two* is a surprising detour into dusty Americana (and features vocals from Kat Von D); the balladic *Dying In The Night* is like *Cat People*-era Bowie in a Bauhaus mood. It's a veritable all-you-can-eat buffet of pitch-black drama and searing rock'n'roll.

Sleazegrinder

Clutch

PA Tapes: Copenhagen 8/23/22 WEATHERMAKER MUSIC

Earth rockers refuse to rest.

Via gigs across the world, Clutch are rapidly following up 2022's *Sunrise On Slaughter Beach* with a series of four live digital releases demonstrating how they strive for excellence on the road.

The band are known for changing the set-list from night to night, and this first instalment, from Vega in Copenhagen, was put together by drummer Jean-Paul Gaster, who does a decent job of balancing new with old. *Slaughter Beach*, *Red Alert (Boss Metal Zone)* and *Nosferatu Madre* represent the brand-spankingly fresh, while the deeper, older cuts make for a pleasant surprise. *Escape From The Prison Planet* kicks off the evening and we get *Rats*, *Impetus*, *Green Buckets*, *7 Jam* and *A Shogun Named Marcus*. The band tear through the set with such fervour it feels like the wheels might fall off during the excellent double whammy of *X-Ray Visions* and *Firebirds!*. Sounds like one helluva gig.

Essi Berelian

The Heavy

Amen BAD SON RECORDINGS

Stirring sixth album from Bath-based blues rockers.

It might have taken them 15 years, but The Heavy's gritty neo-soul sound is now part of America's cultural landscape, providing the soundtrack for everything from Obama's 2012 victory address to Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* to the Super Bowl.

Amen, the follow-up to 2019's *Sons*, sees them fine-tuning a winning formula. *I Feel The Love* is a brassy gospel stomp delivered with a Pentecostal fervour by vocalist Kelvin Swaby, while *Hurricane Coming* – inspired by his first-hand experience of Hurricane Irma – is a coruscating blast of molten R&B.

These musical homages to everything from sumptuous Philly soul (*Whole Lot Of Me*) to gnarly garage rock (*Messin' With My Mind*) also come with a quirky edge. A breezy *Just Like Summer* is actually about the perils of climate change, while vein-bulging rocker *Stone Cold Killer* was inspired by guitarist Dan Taylor's pet kitten.

The cat's whiskers.

Paul Moody

Revolution Saints

Eagle Flight FRONTIERS

AOR all-stars hit and miss.

Deen Castronovo, the drummer with the golden voice, is a busy man these days – starring in Journey and the 'supergroup' projects Generation Radio and Revolution Saints. And with the latter's fourth album, he has two new members alongside him. On bass, replacing Jack Blades, is Jeff Pilson, of Dokken fame, and on guitar is Joel Hoekstra, taking over from Doug Aldrich.

Despite these changes, Revolution Saints are still very much Castronovo's show, his voice uncannily similar to those of Journey singers past and present, Steve Perry and Arnel Pineda. Likewise, *Eagle Flight* follows the template of previous albums, delivering melodic rock as if the 80s had never ended. But all the talent in this band doesn't count for much without great songs, and much of this album is weighed down by predictable, generic material, mostly written by Alessandro Del Vecchio, Frontiers Records' in-house producer. There is one notable exception, though: the album's title track is a monumental anthem, better than anything on Journey's last record, and an early contender for AOR song of the year.

Paul Elliott

Ivan Neville

Touch My Soul THE FUNK GARAGE

New Orleans groove and super-slick R&B reign on Neville's first solo album in 20 years.

If you've never shown any interest in visiting New Orleans, you're certainly likely to after hearing *Greatest Place On Earth*, which finds Ivan Neville tripping down the street like Big Bird, bursting with love for the food, the people, the sunshine and the buzz of his home town, leaving in his wake a trail of tumbling piano, rambunctious soul and cheery brass pulsing with life.

Touch My Soul is Neville's first solo album in two decades, and he's keeping it old-school – there's a definite late-80s/early-90s sheen to it all. Opener *Hey All Together*, an earnest anti-racist plea, could easily have suffered from following too many TV pastiches of star-studded issue songs – it features his father Aaron Neville plus Bonnie Raitt, Michael McDonald and others – but its sheer likeability sees it through. *Dance Music Love* and *Stand For Something* are soaked in funk, while the title track offers pure gospel emotion.

Cream liqueur-smooth, this is far, far away from the rough edges of the rock world, but it's the kind of thing that hazy late-night taxi rides were made for.

Emma Johnston

Jason Bieler And The Baron Von Bielski Orchestra

Postcards From The Asylum BANDCAMP

Ex-Saigon Kicker's overly epic magnum opus.

As guitarist and, later, singer with Florida hard-rock mavericks Saigon Kick, Jason Bieler was the driving force behind one of the great cult bands of the early 90s. Lack of success then and subsequently hasn't stopped him from sharing his entertainingly wayward vision with the world.

This, his fourth solo album, clocks in at a hefty 73 minutes, giving him plenty of time to wander the halls of his mind. And mostly it's terrific stuff. The fabulous *Mexico* is acid-edged chamber-country that radiates heat-haze, *Feels Like Love* is pop-metal in the truest and best sense of the term, and *Bear Sedatives* lands just the right side of quirky. But then he'll start showing off on the tiresomely zany *Flying Monkeys*, or clog up drains with the winkingly self-conscious *Sic Riff*.

Postcards From The Asylum is mostly great. Lop off a quarter of its running time and it would be almost perfect.

Dave Everley

BEST OF THE REST

Other new releases out this month.

The Golden Grass

Life Is Much Stranger HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

NYC power trio's fourth taps neatly into hard rock's 60s/70s-cusp sweet spot. Michael Rafalowich's guitar allies Page heaviness with riff-driven Iommi ingenuity, core material's reliably strong, but ambitiously harmonising dual vocals serially stall at adequate. **7/10**

Laurel Canyon

Laurel Canyon AGITATED

Grunge is still alive and well and living in Philadelphia, if ever so slightly pyschedelicised. Vocals tirelessly stylise ennui, wah-wahing guitars take precedence over lead venting and stomp pedals drive schizo dynamics. Quaintly familiar yet irresistibly powerful. **7/10**

Margarita Witch Cult

Margarita Witch Cult HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

It's gratifying to discover that bands as resolutely heavy as this are still being forged in Birmingham. There may be just the three of them, but theirs is a remorselessly brutal strain of trad metal: double-tracked bludgeoning guitars, lost-soul gang vocals. Classic. **8/10**

Lucifer Star Machine

Satanic Age THE SIGN

Unafraid to channel his inner Vanian/Danzig, Germany-born LSM founder Tor Abyss urges us all to embrace the libertine philosophy of Satanism (and why not?) to a relentless metal orgy that's all power, snot, sweat, tatts, nose-rings and denim. Where do we sign? **8/10**

The Pearl Harts

Love, Chaos DOUBLE BANG

Contrived, with significant South London attitude, from a sassy sound palette vividly spattered with remnants of turn-of-the-century Brooklyn art-rock, vintage electro hip-pop and in-yer-face 90s Shampoo/Spice grrrl power. Outwardly fresh, but intrinsically old hat. **7/10**

Ruff Majik

Elektrik Ram MONGREL

Pounding, bouncing beats propel driving, state-of-the-art, commercially inclined up-tempo alt.rock fashionably haunted by the Kohl-eyed ghost of goth. Singer Johni Holiday reaches for Bowie, finds Molko, and, ironic or not (it's so hard to tell), it's all good, strong stuff. **8/10**

Durand Jones

Wait Til I Get Over COLEMINE

There is a moment in *Lord Have Mercy*, the third track on this solo debut from Louisiana's Durand Jones, where he delivers a vocal tone perfectly equidistant to Sam Cooke and Rod Stewart, and it's like seeing God. R&B, rock, blues, whatever, this is simply stunning. **9/10**

Benefits

Nails INVADA

Pitched somewhere between Sleaford Mods, Consumer Electronics and the late Steven Wells at full-tilt, Middlesborough's Benefits rant with a self-righteous fury so acute that it renders most punk/agit.rock pretty much redundant. Hate everything? You'll love this. **8/10**

Black Orchid Empire

Tempus Veritas SEASON OF MIST

Slightly incongruous to their blazing modern metal sound, London trio BOE keep their vocals clean to flaunt better their historical narrative lyrics, of which they're clearly very proud. A bit Porcupine, a tad pretentious, but with big choruses you just can't argue with. **7/10**

Mick Rossi

All The Saints And All The Souls/Gun St SECRET

Hot on the heels of his fully electric/electrifying *Gun St* solo set (where the ex-Slaughter And The Dogs guitarist proved himself to be far more Thunders than Johansen), a lush, contemplative acoustic LP that suits Rossi's fragile, emotive *Hurt Me*/Ronno vocal to a tee. **7/10**

Swollen Teeth

Swollen Teeth EP BLOWED OUT

Perpetually teetering on the brink of total madness, this five-track EP from primitively masked 'Trü-metal' four-man migraine trigger Swollen Teeth bears all the hallmarks of producer/Slipknot turntablist Sid Wilson. Brutal, disturbing, cinematic, truly savage. Evilly essential. **9/10**

BEST OF THE REST REVIEWS BY IAN FORTNAM

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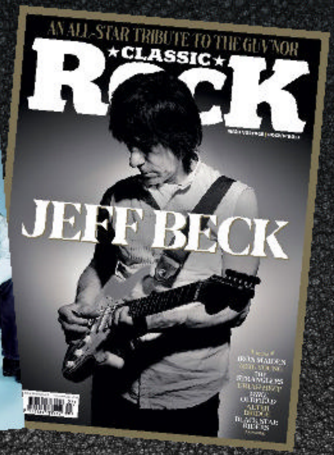

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The Hard Stuff Reissues

Rush

Signals 40th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition *UME/MERCURY/ANTHEM*

A classic album in an underwhelming box set.

There are many landmark tracks in Rush's catalogue: *Working Man*, the first breakout song; *By-Tor And The Snow Dog*, the first epic; *2112*, the conceptual masterpiece; *The Spirit Of Radio* and *Tom Sawyer*, the modernist anthems that connected with a vast global audience; and from the 1982 album *Signals* there is *Subdivisions*, a track that marked the beginning of a whole new phase in the band's career.

As the opening track on the album, *Subdivisions* made a powerful statement. With synthesiser as the lead instrument, it was the sound of a band in transition. As multi-tasking bassist, vocalist and keyboard player Geddy Lee told *Classic Rock*: "*Signals* was a turning point for the band. It was the beginning of our 'keyboard era'. We had used synthesisers since way back, but on *Signals* that really came to the forefront."

This keyboard era would prove to be divisive – for the band and fans alike. Guitarist Alex Lifeson would later admit to feeling sidelined within the group he'd founded. Some fans were turned off. Others, including Trent Reznor, loved the fact that a hard rock group could embrace electronic sounds so fully.

On *Signals*, however, the balance between guitar and keyboards was more equal than on subsequent albums such as *Power Windows* and *Hold Your Fire*. Lifeson played brilliantly on *Digital Man* and *New World Man*, both influenced by the new wave and the 'white reggae' stylings of The Police. He ripped it up on *The Analog Kid*, the album's high-octane rock track. His subtle textures and high-arcing solo in *Subdivisions* gave extra weight to what remains one of the most emotive songs the band ever recorded, with a beautiful melody, and poignant lyrics from drummer Neil Peart on suburban life and teenage rites of passage. There's another amazing Lifeson solo in *Losing It*, a sombre ballad that featured in the band's final show in 2015.

Signals is a classic Rush album, if not as career-defining as *2112* or as perfect as *Moving Pictures*. Certainly it merits a 40th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition – albeit a year late. But a note of caution here. While this box set includes the original album on vinyl, CD and Blu-ray audio, plus four nostalgia-inducing seven-inch singles, a hardback book and assorted artworks, there is no previously unreleased music – not even a period-accurate live set. Given the stature of this album, fans might expect a little more.

Paul Elliott

Thunder

Reissues *BMG*

The first three albums, on CD and coloured vinyl, now with additional tracks.

It was difficult not to fall for Thunder. They seemed to have everything. So why weren't they bigger?

Their first three albums and their handful of contemporaneous extra live tracks (the 2009 reissues were far more extensive) make an eloquent case for reassessment, but don't solve the Thunder conundrum.

Produced by Duran Duran's resident rocker Andy Taylor, 1990's *Backstreet Symphony* (**9/10**) was a turbo-charged declaration of intent, so consistently strong that the fabulous *Distant Thunder* was reduced to extra-track status. *Love Walked In* combined Aerosmith's dirtiness with Foreigner's slickness, while *An Englishman On Holiday* took an acerbic potshot at Iberia-invading beer bores.

Two years later, *A Better Man* would be the closest Thunder came to the almighty single hit that would have made all the difference. Its parent album, the lengthy *Laughing On Judgement Day* (**8/10**), reached No.2 in the UK, their highest chart position. Taylor was an intermittent, hands-off producer this time, guitarist Luke Morley shared more songwriting credits, and on an album of riffs the sprawling *Empty City* veered into *Houses Of The Holy* territory. Alas for them, grunge was taking hold and it was the wrong album at the wrong time. Thirty-something years on, it's more contemporary than ever.

Although 1995's *Behind Closed Doors* (**7/10**) was mostly recorded in the US but with their American label Geffen putting all their eggs in the Nirvana basket it wasn't released there. It ended their deal with EMI, but *River Of Pain* showed the creative fires were still burning.

John Aizlewood

The Yardbirds

Live In Sweden '67 *REPERTOIRE*

The road to Zeppelin winds into Stockholm.

Despite relatively modest record sales, The Yardbirds were arguably as influential as The Beatles and the Stones as they served to shepherd post-Shadows UK pop from the ferociously raw R&B of their earliest Eric Clapton incarnation (captured on *Five Live Yardbirds*), through a succession of muscular Jeff Beck-driven, garage band-birthing, transatlantic seven-inch chart botherers (*Heart Full Of Soul, Over Under Sideways Down*), to the post-psych proto-metal Zep crucible of their final Jimmy Page era.

This short, sharp, 27-minute, eight-track snapshot, recorded live in Stockholm for Sweden's national broadcaster SRT as the band prepared to set out on their Scandinavian tour of April '67, captures the group's ultimate four-piece line-up – Page (guitar), Keith Relf (vocals), Chris Dreja (bass) and Jim McCarty (drums) – on vintage form, if slightly unsure of exactly where they were going.

Opening with crowd-pleasing hit *Shapes Of Things*, they cover Dylan's *Most Likely You'll Go Your Way*, and showcase their latest Mickie Most-produced *Little Games* single (not a good fit for a band already well on their way to defining hard rock), before Page finally shows his teeth and hints at his future with a lengthy assault on Bo Diddley's *I'm A Man*.

Newly available on vinyl and CD, this former bootleg staple isn't exactly essential, but you'll be way better off with it than you will without it.

Ian Fortnam

Neil Young And The Ducks

High Flyin' *WARNERS*

Neil Young & The Santa Monica Flyers

Somewhere Under The Rainbow *WARNERS*

Two genuine curiosities in Young's seemingly never-ending bootleg series.

High Flyin' (**6/10**) is a double live album recorded with a hard-rock supergroup (of sorts) including Moby Grape bassist Bob Mosley, who played a multitude of good-time rock'n'roll bar shows around Santa Cruz in '77. All four members provide vocals (think a low-rent version of CSN&Y), which might have felt democratic at the time but means this recording pales next to the others released so far in this series.

High Flyin' is fine, a romp,

DEBORAH SAMUEL/PRESS

a moment captured in time – and for Young fanatics, worth picking up for the band's soulful rendition of *Little Wing* and barnstorming *Mr. Soul*. It remains more a curiosity than a necessity, though.

More exciting is *Somewhere Under The Rainbow* (**7/10**), recorded live at the Rainbow Theatre in London in 1973, on the *Tonight's The Night* tour, with Nils Lofgren on guitar, and songs such as *Cowgirl In The Sand* and *Tonight's The Night* given extended jams and space to breathe. Young's voice is plaintive and cracked, the guitars whip up a veritable thunderstorm, and the mood is stormy and reflective. Another treasure in a seemingly inexhaustible series of uncovered treasures.

Everett True

10cc

Reissues PROPER/UMC

Latest vinyl reissues from venerated 70s art-poppers.

Lovingly restored to their original soundtrack, these two reissues, following on from *How Dare You!* and *Deceptive Bends*, have been re-pressed with their inventive Hipgnosis sleeves.

The Original Soundtrack (1975, **8/10**) is dominated, retrospectively, by *I'm Not In Love*, whose honeyed, harmonic cascade of backing voices is one of the pop wonders of the world. However, in its relentless, towering, ingenious simplicity, it's atypical of the album. *Une Nuit A Paris*, an extended pop suite, is more representative of the segmented innovation of 10cc at this time, driven in large part by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme. It's closer to Van Dyke Parks than to *Tommy* – beautifully flavoured, evocatively played, whisking you through its scenarios at fast-cut pace. *Blackmail*, although more compressed, is similarly structured – elaborate but made up solely of sugar-coated pop components. Meanwhile, *Life Is A Minestrone*, also a single, does not deserve to be so overshadowed by *I'm Not In Love*.

By the time of 1978's *Bloody Tourists* (**5/10**), Godley and Creme had left 10cc and taken whole dimensions with them. *Dreadlock Holiday* was a huge hit and even today, despite its cod-reggae adding insult to the injury of its racial overtones, retains some allure. Generally, however, the album is competently crafted power-pop but little more. *Shock On The Tube (Don't Want Love)* feels lyrically and musically of the 70s, and by '78 was already as sleazily outmoded as flares. *For You And I*, however, is pleasingly redemptive.

David Stubbs

Scorpions

Colours Of Rock BMG

On fancy vinyl, all the classics and one turkey.

For Scorpions fans whose old vinyl records have seen better days, salvation has arrived. If that original copy of *Taken By Force* has taken a battering over time, it's now available on pristine pure-white 180g vinyl, along with 11 other Scorps albums in various shades.

The umbrella title *Colours Of Rock* is not entirely accurate – *In Trance* (**6/10**), a definitive early album, is on transparent vinyl, and *Blackout* (**9/10**), the game-changing hit from 1982, on 'crystal-clear' – but all 12 look and sound just dandy.

Along with *In Trance*, there is, from the 70s era with Hendrix obsessive Uli Jon Roth on lead guitar, *Fly To The Rainbow* (**5/10**), *Virgin Killer* (**6/10**), *Taken By Force* (**7/10**) and the live double *Tokyo Tapes* (**8/10**). From 1979 there's *Lovedrive* (**9/10**), arguably the greatest of all Scorpions albums, recorded in part with guitar wunderkind Michael Schenker rejoining big brother Rudolf's band, before Matthias Jabs took the job. From the 80s, in addition to *Blackout* there is *Animal Magnetism* (**8/10**), *Love At First Sting* (**8/10**), *World Wide Live* (**7/10**) and *Savage Amusement* (**5/10**). Last, and also least, there's 2007 misstep *Humanity (Hour 1)* (**3/10**), the vinyl gold, the music quite the opposite.

Paul Elliott

Albert King

Born Under A Bad Sign (Special Edition) CRAFT

Bluesman's Stax Records landmark remastered.

It's never too late to strike creative gold. At 46, Albert King had only one LP to show for decades spent honing a startlingly powerful guitar style full of shiver-inducing string bends, writhing licks and agonised howls, along with a charismatic vocal croon and gutsily soulful growl that could lend themselves to all kinds of material.

But when the Stax label squeezed the 6ft 4in, 18-stone King into the studio with their house band Booker T. & The M.G.'s, plus the Memphis Horns for extra brass decoration, the result showed a generation of blues boomers how it was done. Here's where the influence he had on guitarists from Clapton to Hendrix to Robert Cray is laid bare, while the lithe instrumental grooves built around him by the band make *Born Under A Bad Sign* the definitive showcase for him, particularly on the prowling majesty of the title track and the stomping braggadocio of *The Hunter*, which sound that bit punchier here in remastered form. Tracks such as the self-written *Personal Manager* (any idea what '*your ice cream man when the day is through*' refers to?) also display a cheeky lyrical humour often under-appreciated within the genre.

Johnny Sharp

Whitesnake

Still Good To Be Bad RHINO

Whitesnake's tenth studio album reissued, with added, bells, whistles and horns.

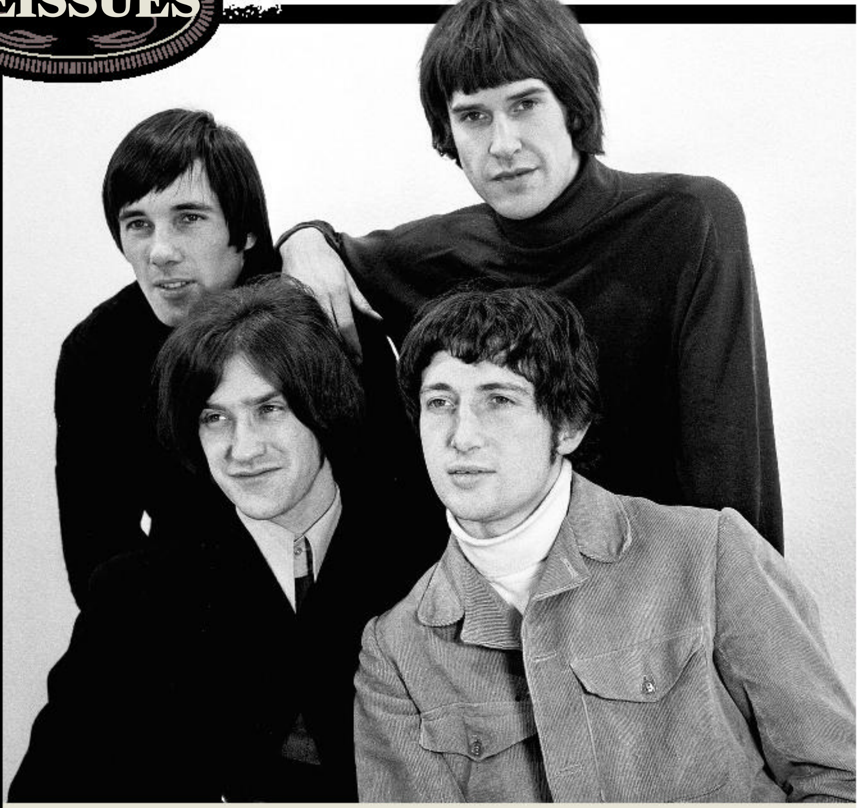
Coming out of the darkness (and possibly in from the rain) like a character from a David Coverdale song, Whitesnake's *Good To Be Bad* was the surprise studio album from a band who hadn't released a new record for the best part of a decade. Whitesnake had become a 'greatest hits' live vehicle – and who doesn't love a show where the singer *doesn't* deliver the immortal introduction: "Here's a few new ones"? Although when you've lost and loved like Coverdale, you still need to vent your creative spleen occasionally, and nowhere does he do so more than on 2008's *Good To Be Bad*.

Lyrically, Coverdale, like many a blues singer before him, still had many a woman who had done him wrong. But with the help of guitarist Doug Aldrich he buffed and polished his broken heart until it gleamed and was nearly as good as new again. Which is to say that *Good To Be Bad* was something of an unexpected gem for those who had given up on the band returning to their original soul and blues roots. This Whitesnake was the arena-pleasing, swaggering, rock-radio unit.

And time's been kind to this collection, and the multitude of extra add-ons; remixes, remastering, all pleasingly punchy and pushing needles into the red. Better still are the extra discs of out-takes and reworked versions, the Hook City Harlots horn section and drummer Tommy Aldridge thumping their way through the throwaway *Dog*, but the off-the-scale energy is jaw dropping all the same. Or the flip-side to that, the lilting *Summer Rain (Unzipped)*. Both are pleasing, surprise left turns.

Disc 4, the so called 'Evolution' collection, is sometimes raw demos and studio jams, Coverdale sometimes off mic, phrasing lyrics and melody lines, and Aldrich strumming and picking his way along on an acoustic guitar. It's sketches, templates and building blocks, and to hear a song being built from the ground up is really quite remarkable. Even when Coverdale's vocal slips off key, the recording doesn't spare the singer's blushes. It's not ever likely to be the first thing you turn to on this hefty reissue, but it's guaranteed to be the disc that will keep bringing you back for more.

Philip Wilding



The Kinks

The Journey Part 1 BMG

Episode one of The Kinks' story, in four deep-diving segments.

More magical mystery tour than supersonic rocket ship ride, this *Journey*. To mark their 60th anniversary, The Kinks take a trip around their back catalogue that's very much in the spirit of Terry and Julie's meandering tour of London.
A roundabout sort of wander, led by feeling and skipping some of the more celebrated sights in order to marvel at the back roads and hidden beauty spots missed by the charging throngs.

Arranged into four themed sections to reflect the "trials and tribulations" of their story – collections of songs about young manhood, success, regret and fresh starts – these 36 tracks begin at the proto-punk riffs and R&B grooves of *You Really Got Me* and *All Day And All Of The Night*, which could have done with a beefier, punchier remaster for the occasion. But from 1964 it takes numerous diversions into under-appreciated singles, album tracks and B-sides from the next 11 years up to 1975's *Schoolboys In Disgrace*. The emotion-led curation of the catalogue naturally elevates meaningful minor tracks above the more obvious hits: the randy roustabout of 1966's *Dandy*, *Drivin'*'s driving rock flip-side *Mindless Child Of Motherhood*, and forgotten singles like the baroque-pop *Wonderboy* and T.Rex-gone-calypso sci-fi utopia *Supersonic Rocket Ship*.

We get *Tired Of Waiting For You*, *Days* and *Waterloo Sunset* here, but the likes of *Lola*, *Sunny Afternoon* and *Apeman* are presumably kept back for future releases.

The narrative format is quintessentially Kinksian, but the effect is to somewhat explode the traditional idea of the mod movers who swiftly transformed into whimsical storytellers of village green British pop. This Kinks is a far more exploratory proposition, finding sonic links with Simon & Garfunkel (*So Long*), Dylan (*Where Have All The Good Times Gone?*, *Death Of A Clown*), The Byrds (*Tired Of Waiting*)… and even, come the radio-rock mid-70s era, Steve Miller or the Eagles. 1972's sublime *Celluloid Heroes* – where Ray Davies takes a romantic stroll around a different sort of sunset, honouring the lost stars on Hollywood's Walk Of Fame – even exhibits a canny connection to *Hunky Dory* and *Ziggy*, such was Davies's restless stylistic questing. And while there's plenty of fluff, it's heartening to see the spotlight fall on tracks such as 1970's lovely psych rock Americana homage *Strangers*, or the Wings-y *Shangri-La*.

A welcome reminder, then, that while The Kinks were undoubtedly not like anybody else, they didn't exist in a world entirely their own.

■■■■■■■□□□

Mark Beaumont

Tears For Fears

The Hurting UMC/MERCURY

40th-anniversary edition of Bath duo's emotionally charged debut.

While presentation is pivotal to pop music, it can also be deceptive. On the surface, Tears For Fears seemed like just another pretty-boy synth duo when they first hit big with *Mad World* in 1982. But beneath the hummable chorus lay traces of trauma and isolation, with allusions to the primal scream therapy undergone by chief songwriter Roland Orzabal. Both he and cohort Curt Smith had come from broken homes, the themes of rejection and abandonment feeding directly into the following year's *The Hurting*. And while *Pale Shelter* and *Change* followed *Mad World* into the upper reaches of the UK chart, the rest of the album was altogether less hit-savvy, taking cues from Peter Gabriel, Talking Heads and Eno. *The Prisoner* sounds like a dystopian prog vision; a bare pulse and screechy sax – from King Crimson's Mel Collins – mirror the troubled lyrics of *Ideas As Opiates*; the ambitious *Memories Fade* struggles to mask its psychological scars.

This vinyl reissue brings added depth and clarity to Tears For Fears' original concept, although Steven Wilson's Dolby Atmos mix (in limited-edition Blu-ray format via superdeluxeedition.com) brings further spatial finesse. The latter also includes two previously unreleased demos of *Mad World* and *Watch Me Bleed*.

■■■■■■■■□□

Rob Hughes

Kiss

Kiss Off The Soundboard: Live In Poughkeepsie UME

Gene and Paul unmasked and in the raw in 1984.

Kiss recently became embroiled in a mini-controversy over using pre-recorded backing tracks, with manager Doc McGhee admitting that Paul Stanley's live vocals are 'enhanced' these days. But there's no such devilishness here - the latest in the band's fan-serving *Off The Soundboard* series is rawer than Gene Simmons' nut sack in a too-tight metal codpiece.

Recorded at Poughskeepsie's 3,000-capacity Mid-Hudson Arena on November 28, 1984, the hook is that this is the only live Kiss recording in existence with Mark St. John, the one-and-done guitarist who played on that year's *Animalize* album. St John oozes 80s flash, but he lacks the character of Ace Frehley and the dazzle of his immediate predecessor Vinnie Vincent (by contrast, drummer Eric Carr deserved way more credit than he ever got while he was alive).

As ever, Paul Stanley's stage raps are worth the price of entry on their own, not the least the revelation that he once worked in the area – never have the words "I used to be a waiter in Hopewell Junction, I tell ya!" received such a rapturous reception. It's fascinating to hear 80s anthems *Heaven's On Fire* and *Young And Wasted* in a contemporary setting, while they go even further back with an unlikely instrumental version of old-timey 1848 song *Oh! Susanna* – a time capsule within a time capsule.

■■■■■■■□□□

Dave Everley

Family

Anyway ESOTERIC

Not one of their best, but much better now expanded.

Half-live/half-studio albums – a half-arsed, questionable format – are almost always somehow lacking and unsatisfying. And Family's 1970 hybrid *Anyway* was a good example.

Given that Family could be such a great live band, especially between the late 60s and early 70s, it's both surprising and frustrating that they never released a decently recorded, properly representative live album. And the four live tracks on the original *Anyway* really didn't do a lot to help fill the hole.

With the addition of 16 mostly live, mostly BBC recordings from 1970 (previously released) as bonus tracks, this 24-track reissue package is effectively a collection of their best live recordings. But you still puzzle over how their often sparking live performances could have consistently been so poorly recorded and mixed.

Sadly there's nothing from debut *Music In A Doll's House* and only a sparse selection from second *Family Entertainment*, but thankfully there's nothing post-

AVALON RED/PRESS

Fearless, after which one of the truly great original progressive groups eventually morphed into something closer to pub rock.

Of the original's four studio tracks, only the enjoyably retro *Anyway* impresses sufficiently.

For all the sonic failings of the live material, though, there are some wonderful songs here – *The Weaver's Answer, Drowned In Wine, No Mule's Fool* – that are so evocative of a time when artists valued such things as originality and invention over anything to do with commerce. And for a brief period Family were among the bands doing it best.

Paul Henderson

Various

Nightclubbing: The Birth Of Punk Rock In NYC

WIENERWORLD

The film features Ramones, Bruce Springsteen, New York Dolls and peers playing at legendary NYC dive Max's Kansas City.

The accompanying soundtrack album for *Nightclubbing* is far scuzzier and sleazy, low-rent: forgotten scenesters such as Jimi LaLumia & Psychotic Frogs and the Electric Lovehandles roar, stomp and scratch their way for attention with stump-bitten fingernails next to early punk/trash icon Jayne County and glam fighters Shrapnel. It's clear that the New York Dolls didn't exist in a vacuum.

There are some gems here among the dirt: Jayne, of course, including three renditions of the Velvets'-esque *Max's Kansas City* (*'I see Patti Smith, she's the Stagger Lee of rock'n'roll'*) easily as fine as Mink Deville's *Spanish Stroll*; The B-Girls with their proto-Blondie bubblegum blast of *I'll Be Your Alibi*; Jayne and Jimi together on the straight-baiting anthem *Leave My Pussy Alone*. And Jimi's divisive cult hit Death *To Disco (Disco Sucks)*. Was it tasteless? Yes. Was that the whole point anyway? Yes.

Twenty-one tracks of gender-bending trash and glam, with some horrible pub-rock rhythm 'n' blues thrown in for good measure (hello Deadbeat Poets). No one is disputing Max's Kansas City's claim to be the birthplace of New York punk. Except maybe CBGB.

Everett True

King's X

In The New Age: Atlantic Recordings 88-95

HNE RECORDINGS

Cult Texan trio's imperial phase collected in one place.

A breakdown of the six albums King's X made between 1988 and 1995 looks like this: three amazing, two excellent, one pretty damn good. That's a hell of strike rate by anyone's standards. Their label, Atlantic, certainly thought so, and persevered with the band despite media interest far outweighing sales. So too did the members of Pearl Jam and Alice In Chains, who recognised the Houston trio's genius.

Those six Atlantic albums are now collected in this box set. A quarter of a century on, it's still astounding how unique 1988's *Out Of The Silent Planet*, 1989's untouchable *Gretchen Goes To Nebraska* and 1991's *Faith Hope Love* sound: equal parts The Beatles, U2, Rush and Motörhead, powered by Doug Pinnick's gospel choir-trained voice.

While 1992's self-titled fourth album and 1994's grunge-adjacent *Dogman* don't scale the heights of their predecessors, they're still as exhilarating and ground-breaking as anything King's X's contemporaries were coming up with. Even their Atlantic swansong, *Ear Candy*, released when both band and label knew the game was up, has moments of pure brilliance, such as the yearning *Looking For Love*.

There's no unreleased material here for King's X fans who already own these albums, and it's unlikely to convert anyone at this late stage. But *In The New Age: Atlantic Recordings 88-95* stands as testament to one of the greatest unsung bands of the past 35 years.

Dave Everley

Be-Bop Deluxe

Sunburst Finish (Vinyl)

ESOTERIC

'Bursting the Be-Bop bubble.

No *Finish*-ing retouches here, this being a no-bells-and-whistles repro of Be-Bop Deluxe's third album from February 1976.

Yeah, there's nothing drastic about this particular piece of plastic, apart from a barely detectable remix job. The original artwork remains intact, the naked-woman-with-burning-guitar reminiscent of a Scorpions LP. It's a deceptive image, because B-BD, led by guitar eccentric Bill Nelson, were an unusual beast, almost a 'rockist' XTC. But their artsy progressive pop has aged very badly indeed. When 10cc (there are similarities) released *Art For Art's Sake*, Bill's band could've 'n' should've offered Quirk For Quirk's Sake as an alternative.

Despite being much adored by Iron Maiden's Steve Harris, *Sunburst Finish* remains too clever by half. A jumble of influences jotted in my notes: Television, Gary Moore, The Buggles, Wishbone Ash, Status Quo, Styx, David Bowie. Too many ideas, too little cohesion. To quote from B-BD's *Life In The Air Age*, *'it's grim enough to make a robot cry'*.

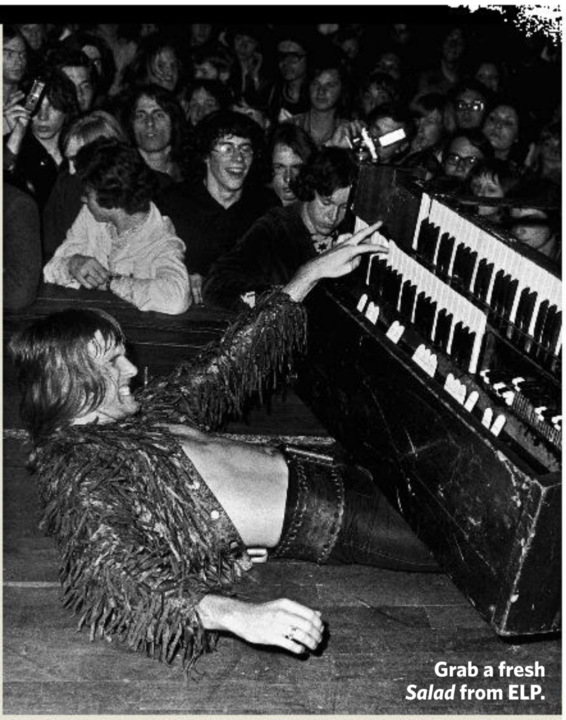
It's neat how the tracks segue into each other, and there are a few (too few) moments of terrific riffage. But weak, echoey vocals and sixth-form poetry do not a great album make.

Coming soon: Bill Nelson's Red Nose. (At least that's what we used to call them.)

Geoff Barton

Record Store Day Releases

Selected highlights from the sixteenth annual celebration of the deliberately limited edition.



Grab a fresh *Salad* from ELP.

We may well be in the grip of fuel and food poverty, but there still seems to be more than enough vinyl out there (in almost any colour you like) to bloat record shop browsers for at least one day of the year. If you're the kind of discerning punter who simply can't be arsed to fight tooth and nail with one of your own for the last picture disc of Emerson, Lake & Palmer's prog masterpiece *Brain Salad Surgery* (BMG, **8/10**) in the shop, you can always attempt to secure one online. But whatever your collecting MO, here are some plum RSD releases for you to hunt down and hoover up.

Mike Oldfield's *Opus One* (UMR/EMI, **7/10**) places 1971's raw but still astonishing *Tubular Bells* demos onto vinyl, while the Ramones' *Pleasant Dreams: New York Sessions* (Rhino, yellow vinyl, **8/10**) improves on Da Brudders' sixth album by stripping it of its commercial production sheen.

Bay Area popcore Ramonas The Donnas' *Early Singles 1995-1999* (Real Gone, **7/10**) arrives across 2000 metallic gold double vinyl 12s, while David Bowie's *Laughing With Liza: The Vocation And Deram Singles* (Decca, **7/10**) places five formative Gnome-era 7s in a singularly handsome box. Goths can brighten up their ebony tombs with the 'smokey' vinyl repress of The Sisters Of Mercy's genre-essential second *The Reptile House* EP (Rhino, **7/10**), while those of a psych persuasion will delight in The Smoke's purple vinyl version of their sole '67 album *It's Smoke Time* (Morgan Blue Town, **8/10**) featuring the indispensable *My Friend Jack*. Demon corner the glam market with releases from T.Rex, the '73 Japan-only *Rockin' & Rollin'* compilation (pink vinyl, **8/10**) and Suede, whose debut album's *Demos* (clear vinyl, **8/10**) retain a startling, audacious brilliance despite more than 30 years of familiarity.

Ozzy Osbourne might hate it, but there's nothing so fatally wrong with '78 Black Sabbath's *Never Say Die* (BMG, **7/10**) that metal stalwarts won't want to pick it up on clear and light-blue splatter vinyl, complete with a reproduction of the original Ten Year War brochure.

And finally, a couple of hefty Rhino boxes. Van Halen's first Sammy Hagar-era live album *Right Here, Right Now* (**5/10**) has been spread – thinly – across four red vinyl discs, while the timelessly brilliant *Nuggets* compilation of first-generation psych (**9/10**) has been beautifully expanded across a quintet of vinyls, with new liner notes from original curator Lenny Kaye.

Ian Fortnam

GETTY

THE HARD STUFF
STUFF
BOOKS & DVDs

ROSS HALFIN/PRESS

Def Leppard

Definitely: The Official Story Of Def Leppard *GENESIS PUBLICATIONS*

The story of Sheffield's finest in words and dazzling pictures.

Definitely is pitched as the definitive Def Leppard book, telling the Sheffield band's tale via hundreds of iconic and previously unseen photos alongside an in-depth oral history by the current line-up. But it's more than that. It's a flashback to a time when hard rock bands truly were the kings of the world – an era that seems increasingly like a distant memory today.

The trove of personal photos from their early years is truly fantastic. It captures the exhilaration and chaos of life in a band with their whole future ahead of them – Leppard on stage and backstage at their early gigs, topless and gooning about at various US enormodomes, being bundled into flight cases so they can sneak through audiences to the *Hysteria* tour's ground-breaking in-the-round stage, hanging out with U2's Bono back when both groups were rivals for the title of biggest band on the planet.

The text is equally vivid, charting their initial rush of success (spearheaded by legendary *Sounds* writer Geoff Barton and photographer Ross Halfin) and through the highs and lows that followed. The excitement of being strapped to the rocket as it takes off is palpable, and the traumas that the band have dealt with – drummer Rick Allen's car crash, the death of guitarist Steve Clark, his replacement Vivian Campbell's cancer diagnosis in 2013 – are addressed emotionally but with dignity.

In the book as in real life, singer Joe Elliott is the dominant voice. He's the Fred Trueman of rock'n'roll: a blunt Yorkshireman with the subtlety of a breeze block and a deep-rooted allergy to keeping his thoughts to himself. That thick skin must have come in useful when looking back at photos of himself in some of the ridiculous outfits he's worn – the Union Jack T-shirt/shorts combo Leppard sported circa *Pyromania* is the least of his crimes against fashion.

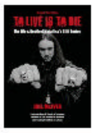
There are some issues. Original guitarist Pete Willis, fired in 1982, is grudgingly allowed just one quote to give his side of the story. And apart from a few moments the latter part of Leppard's career is less interesting visually and narratively – the photos are professional and expensive-looking, but lack some of the intimacy and excitement of their early years. Plus it's hard not to wonder how much isn't being told for the sake of decorum; it's more *The Mildly Grimy* than *The Dirt*. But for all that, *Definitely* succeeds in its main aim, which is to be the definitive Def Leppard book, Union Jack shorts and all.

Dave Everley

Cliff Burton: To Live Is To Die (Revised Third Edition)

Joel McIver *JAWBONE PRESS*

Second update of the definitive account of the late Metallica man's seismic impact.



The tendency to mythologise deceased musicians and exaggerate their legacy remains as widespread as ever. But the fact that this biography is now in its third edition reflects its importance in reinforcing its subject's status.

Although Cliff Burton was more often singled out during Metallica's early days for his taste in laughably uncool flared denims, as a keen student of the bass guitar himself McIver is well qualified to take a detailed look at the contributions the moustachioed Californian made in the studio. These underline, like highlighted sections on an orchestral score, just how effectively Burton's bass-playing skills didn't just help reshape the band's sound, but also that of rock music in general.

For bassists it's required reading. For Metallica fans it blends the anoraky detail of finger-style techniques with a compelling account of the wider story of the band before, during and after Burton's tenure. Either way, it continues to do the bell-bottomed one proud.

Johnny Sharp

What The Hell Happened To Blood Sweat & Tears?

Abramorama *SPINNING WHEEL*

How a jazz-rock band became a US government pawn.

In the musty political climate of 1970, someone at the US State Department had the idea of scoring a propaganda coup by sponsoring an American band on tour in communist-controlled Eastern Europe, hoping that they might ferment unrest among the "freedom-seeking" youth of Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland.

Blood Sweat & Tears, a brass-heavy band fronted by singer David Clayton Thomas, were the unwitting pawns in this game. A fine jazz-rock combo, they were nobody's idea of the counter-revolution, except for the communist authorities, who gave them a hard time. As did the counter-revolutionaries back home who accused them of being government stooges. Their credibility was shot.

The surviving film footage of the tour is of some historical interest, but is as clueless about the purpose of the tour as the band themselves, judging from the interviews.

Hugh Fielder

Heady Daze: The Mission Years 1985-1990

Wayne Hussey *OMNIBUS PRESS*

Giddy account of the post-Sisters Of Mercy glory years.

Wayne Hussey stresses that The Mission were no "po-faced" goth band. He needn't worry. It's clear from this highly entertaining second volume of his memoirs that The Mission are much closer to the *Viz*/Macc Lads end of the spectrum than Dead Can Dance. Hussey is Yorkshire; "No Manchester United fans need apply," he once stipulated in an ad for a new guitarist.

The late 80s were The Mission's heyday. They were the anti-C86 band, rampantly unfashionable in their embrace of Led Zeppelin as muses. They tour bussed to fame on a tide of booze, amphetamines, fags, sex, violence and mishap, culminating in a foul-mouthed confrontation on *The James Whale Show*. Soaring above all is the "glorious traction" of their music. Hussey describes the *Whale* appearance as like "watching someone I used to know". *Heady Days* evokes a rock'n'roll world itself all but vanished.

David Stubbs

Giorgio Gomelsky: For Your Love

Francis Dumaurier

AURORA METRO

The Crawdaddy of them all gets a biography.

In his autobiography *Life*, Keith Richards pinpoints "the exact moment when our future was assured – our getting a regular gig at the Crawdaddy Club, from which everything sprinkled out. Fame in six weeks".

Giorgio Gomelsky started the Crawdaddy and managed the Stones briefly before Andrew Oldham nabbed them. Russia-born jazz fanatic Gomelsky was a larger-than-life maverick who

took the fledgling Yardbirds to Memphis to record *Train Kept A-Rollin'* in Sun Studios. His Marmalade label put out Julie Driscoll's *This Wheel's On Fire*, and in the 70s he worked with Can and Magma. He spent his later years in New York, where he turned his basement into a rehearsal space. The author gives a poignant description of the former Svengali hunched under plastic sheeting in his dilapidated home, thumbing through Keith's book. Not a happy ending, but it must have been a blast while it lasted.

Claudia Elliott

Tell Everyone: A People's History Of The Faces

Richard Houghton

SPENWOOD BOOKS

For the fans, by the fans.

More than 500 ordinary and not so ordinary (step up Glen Matlock) Faces fans wax nostalgic about catching Rod Stewart (with Long John Baldry, at The Railway Hotel, Wealdstone in '64), the Small Faces (Torquay Town Hall, '65), the Jeff Beck Group (The Douglas Hotel, Aberdeen '67) and, crucially, The Faces at their genesis (Croydon Greyhound, '69), peak (Finsbury Park Rainbow, '72) and apparent swansong (Hurtwood Park Polo Club, 2015).

Curator Richard Houghton's a safe pair of hands (he's done at least a dozen of these sort of vox-pop memoirs before), but while the people's priceless eyewitness accounts are the essential element here, their humdrum recollections don't always sparkle off the page.

Ian Fortnam

Hendrix 66/67: Day By Day

Ben Valkhoff & Luigi Garuti WWW.JIMIHENDRIXBOOKS.COM

The definitive Hendrix diary's first instalment.

As 1966 begins, Hendrix is bed-hopping in New York City, playing with a variety of bands, but is essentially an unknown quantity. It's not until June that Linda Keith catches him playing with Curtis Knight at The Cheetah Club and changes his luck. Keith, who's over with the Rolling Stones, drags them along to see him play, and tries to interest Andrew Loog Oldham and Seymour Stein in managing him, but both pass. Ex-Animals bassist Chas Chandler, her third port of call, sees potential, and by the end of April '67 (where this unprecedentedly detailed account, packed with eyewitness accounts, performance details, interviews, set-lists and session minutiae, concludes), Hendrix is settled in the UK and, along with the Experience, one of the most sought-after emerging stars on the Swinging London scene.

The most influential guitarist in rock history, an era-defining icon, Hendrix deserves this kind of forensic, lovingly wrought, near-400-page hardback chronicle. It might just be the beginning, but it works perfectly well as a standalone tome. Extraordinary stuff.

Ian Fortnam

Swing Of The Blade: More Stories From Metal Blade Records

Brian Slagel with Mark Eglinton METAL BLADE

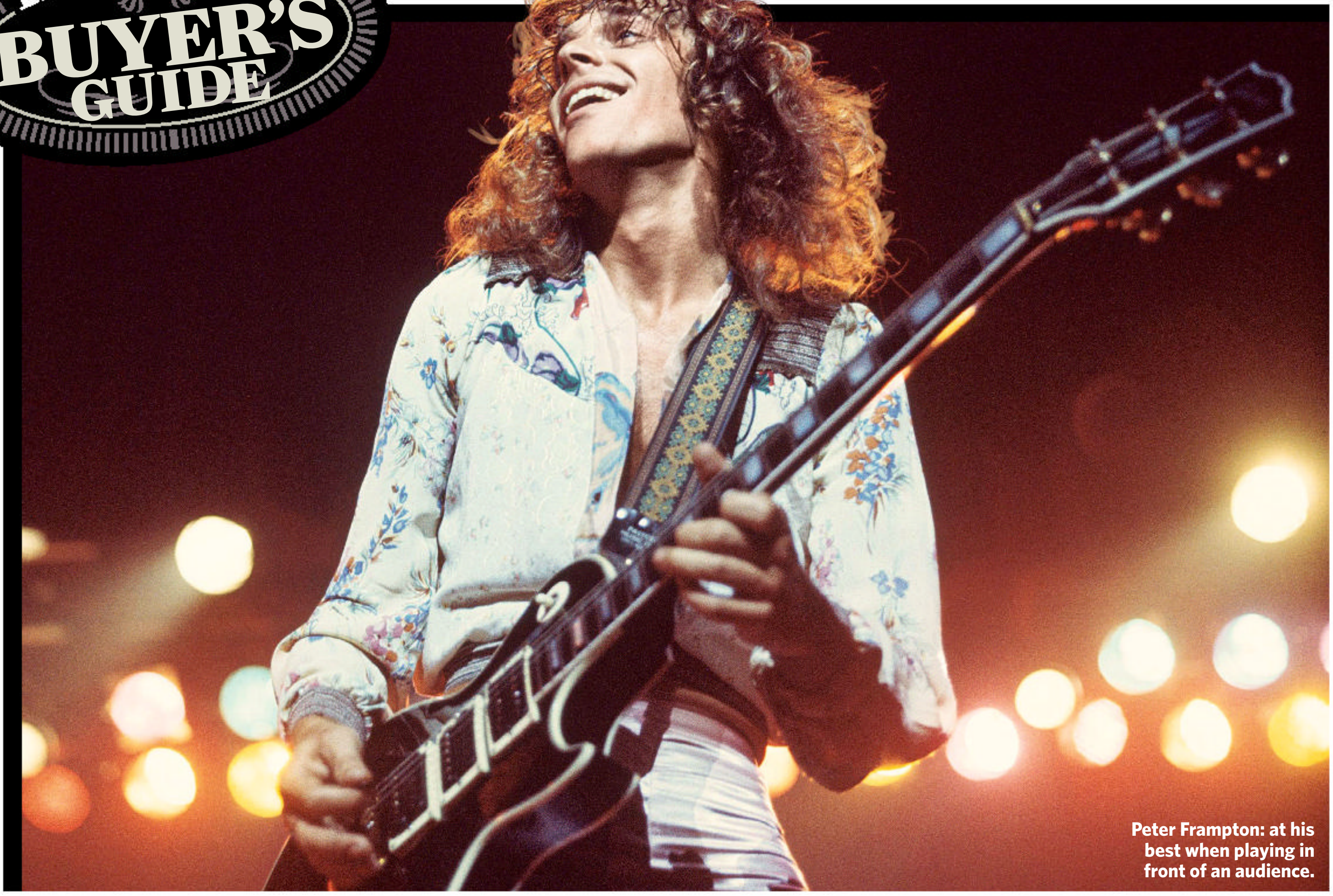
Fascinating insider's view of the underground heavy metal scene.

Metal Blade Records founder Brian Slagel's first book, *For The Sake Of Heaviness* (2017), charted his journey from teenage heavy metal devotee to unlikely kingmaker and the man who helped propel bands ranging from Metallica to the Goo Goo Dolls to stardom.

This follow-up is less autobiography, more a collection of memories and anecdotes that constitutes a history of the underground metal scene from 1981 to today. There's no rock'n'roll debauchery here. Instead, what makes *Swing Of The Blade* special is Slagel's passion for the bands and music that have been part of his life for more than 40 years. Metallica appear, naturally, but he's just as enthusiastic about the bands who slipped down the back of the sofa of history: Obsession, Warlord, Witchkiller, Helstar, Pandemonium and more. The book throws some interesting nuggets of information (it turns out that Jim Carrey really is a death metal fan), but mostly it's a heartfelt love letter to heavy metal.

Dave Everley

The Hard Stuff Buyer's Guide



Peter Frampton: at his best when playing in front of an audience.

Peter Frampton

The affable British singer-guitarist has delivered more that 50 years' worth of compelling songcraft and searing guitar playing.

The two words that we most associate with Peter Frampton are 'comes alive'. And he really is one of those artists who is at their best playing in front of an audience. Among his diverse, decades-spanning discography, it's two double live albums – one with Humble Pie, one solo – that truly capture his artistry. "I've always gone on stage at the top of my game," he says. "Or tried to."

Born in 1950, Frampton was something of a child prodigy, soaking up everything from Buddy Holly to Chet Atkins to Kenny Burrell. He taught himself to play guitar when he was eight, and played his first professional gigs when he was just 13. By the time he was 16 he was writing his own songs and performing as frontman with The Herd on *Top Of The Pops*. He never looked back. "For me it was always a learning curve. And I'm still on it," Frampton says.

Over the years ahead his course load included Humble Pie and Steve Marriott, sessions with George Harrison and Harry Nilsson, nearly becoming a Rolling Stone, touring as David Bowie's guitarist, stardom, near-obscurity, and of course *Frampton Comes Alive!*, that iconic emblem of 70s rock and still one of the biggest-selling records of all-time. Frampton modestly admits that he thought of the studio records leading up to it as a kind of apprenticeship. "I was learning how to sing properly," he says. "I was becoming more relaxed and creative as a songwriter."

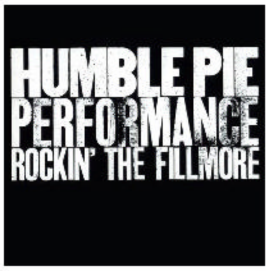
But no matter where he was in his musical journey, Frampton was always eminently listenable. Reflective ballads like *Lines On My Face*, flat-out rockers like *Breaking All The Rules*, showy instrumentals such as *Boot It Up*… Drop the needle anywhere in his catalogue and you'll find something that will grab you. Of the 18 studio albums he's released, only one of them doesn't quite measure up – and even he would agree.

In 2017, Frampton was diagnosed with inclusion body myositis, a progressive degenerative disorder that weakens the legs, arms and, more worrying for a guitarist, the wrists and fingers. Although he concluded a farewell tour in 2022, he has already done several shows and guest appearances this year. So maybe goodbyes don't mean forever.

"It's starting to affect my hands, but not enough yet," Frampton says of the disease. "I can still play a good lick."

Bill DeMain

Essential Classics



Humble Pie

Performance – Rockin' The Fillmore A&M, 1971

'I want you to love me till the hair stands on my head!' Steve Marriott screams on *Four Day Creep*, kicking off one of rock's most electrifying live albums. Marriott's raw charisma is complemented perfectly by Peter Frampton's refined melodicism throughout, swinging from roof-raising riffs (*I Don't Need No Doctor*) to 20-minute guitar reveries (*I Walk On Gilded Splinters*). For more of a good thing, a four-disc box set version was released in 2013. Of *Performance…*, Frampton told me: "Steve was at a hundred and fifty per cent and I had to match it. That's why we were such a fiery band on stage."

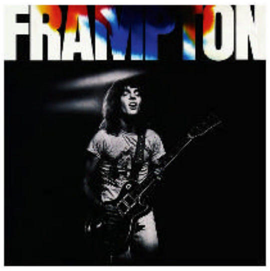
Peter Frampton

Frampton Comes Alive! A&M, 1976

Years of non-stop touring had built both a fiercely loyal following and an ultra-tight stage show for Frampton. Add to this a well-paced set-list of romantic hits like *Wind Of Change* and *Baby, I Love Your Way*, plus guitar-shredding jams like *I Wanna Go To The Sun* and *Do You Feel Like We Do?* and you have the perfect platform for his lift-off to stardom. The controlled fire of his lead guitar playing, his clear, soulful voice, accessible songwriting, and of course the talkbox. It's all here. "Do you feel like we do?" Frampton and his Gibson Black Beauty ask. Then and now, the answer is a resounding "Yes!"

GETTY

Superior Reputation cementing



Peter Frampton

Frampton A&M, 1975

The three albums that Frampton made in rapid succession between 1972-74 were pleasant, if a bit undistinguished. "It was my discovery period," he said. He found his voice on this one, and that voice had many colours. Smart, Motown-style pop (*Show Me The Way*), insistent rockers (*I'll Give You Money*), Django-esque flights (*Fanfare*), Valentine come-ons (*Baby, I Love Your Way*) and folky instrumentals (*Penny For Your Thoughts*). Thanks to Frampton's unfussy vocals and tasteful guitar playing, it all hangs together perfectly. This was his first album to crack the Top 40, and the one that presaged the fireworks ahead.

Peter Frampton

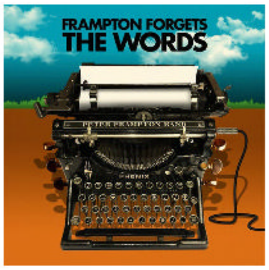
Breaking All The Rules A&M, 1981

The front cover pic of a leather-jacketed Frampton lighting a cigarette against a nightscape conveys the vibe within – hard-edged urban rock. Frampton's seventh album comes charging out of the gate with the riff-driven *Dig What I Say, I Don't Want To Let You Go* and *Rise Up*. The tempo slows briefly for two ballads – *Going To L.A.* and *Lost A Part Of You* – then gets back to the mission at hand. The title track, a seven-minute anthem with a goosebump chorus ('*We are the young ones crying out*') that is pure serotonin, is surely the greatest miss of Frampton's career.

Peter Frampton

Fingerprints A&M, 2006

Before his solo career, Frampton was a hot session guitarist, working with George Harrison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Donovan and others. His versatility finds its full flowering on this all-instrumental collection. *Boot It Up* sears like a jazz-fusion nod to Jeff Beck. *Float* embraces Chet Atkins-style country. *My Cup of Tea* pairs him with Hank Marvin for a moody duet. But the standout is *Cornerstones*, with his singing leads bolstered by a rhythm section of a reunited Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman. Of this Grammy-winning album, Frampton said: "It changed people's perception of me back to how it was in my early solo days."



Peter Frampton

Frampton Forgets The Words UM-E, 2021

This cleverly titled instrumental covers album is Frampton's defiant response to the news of his IBM diagnosis. Whether ripping into Lenny Kravitz's *Are You Gonna Go My Way*, working the wah-wah on a funky take of Sly Stone's *If You Want Me To Stay*, sailing on the celestial seas of David Bowie's *Loving The Alien* or interpreting Radiohead's *Reckoner* with flamenco flair, he plays with soul, finesse and an unerring sense of which notes to include and which to leave out. This album is a late-period gem, and one that will hopefully point the way forward to more studio work.

Good Worth exploring

The Herd

Paradise Lost: The Complete UK Fontana Recordings CHERRY RED, 2011

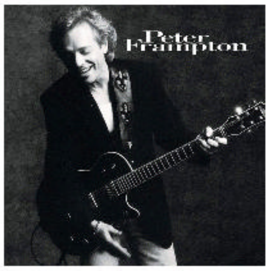
Frampton was a precocious 16-year-old when he joined The Herd. Sure, he was a cute pin-up pop star, but there were already intriguing hints of his curiosity and deep talent. Especially on the songs he wrote. *On Your Own* is an organ-drenched bluesy warning to the woman who's about to leave him, with Frampton's vocal channelling his hero Ray Charles. *Impressions Of Oliver* is a groovy jazz breakbeat instrumental, with Frampton weaving Wes Montgomery-style octaves through blaring brass. Elsewhere, it's high-caliber tuneful pop. A forgotten contender in the 60s catalogue of UK bands.

Peter Frampton

Premonition VIRGIN, 1986

Ten years after *Comes Alive!*, Frampton was trying to stay relevant in the glossy 80s landscape of drum machines and synth-pop. While this album does sound dated (orchestral slams are so '86), there are some memorable songs here. The sky-scraping power ballad *Hiding From A Heartache*, the hooky, shoulda-been-a-hit *Into View* and the standout rocker *Know So Well*, powered by some of Frampton's most unhinged lead guitar playing ever.

The guitar textures and tones on this album caught the ear of Frampton's old school chum David Bowie, who promptly hired him to play on his *Glass Spider* tour in 1987.



Peter Frampton

Peter Frampton RELATIVITY, 1994

In 1991, just months before his former Humble Pie bandmate Steve Marriott's death, he and Frampton had started working on an album together. The inclusion here of one of those lost tracks, the northern soul-flavored vocal duet *Out Of The Blue*, alone makes this album worth the price of admission. In tribute to his friend, Frampton reconnects with the Humble Pie spirit on solid tracks such as *Off The Hook, Day In The Sun, You* and *Shelter Through The Night*. Other highlights are the delicate acoustic instrumental *Young Island*, and the catchy *Can't Take That Away*, co-written with Journey's keyboard player Jonathan Cain.

Avoid

Peter Frampton

I'm In You A&M, 1977

In our recent interview for *Classic Rock*, I asked Frampton if there's anything he would have changed about his career. He said: "I never would've put out *I'm In You*."

A rush-job attempt to capitalise on the success of *Comes Alive!*, it re-framed him as a soft-focus balladeer. To be fair, the album has its moments, like the supple slide guitar licks on *Won't You Be My Friend?*, the cover of Stevie Wonder's *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*, and then Stevie himself guesting on harmonica on the island-flavoured *Rocky's Hot Club*. But *I'm In You* is mostly the sound of an artist being pressured and boxed in by his own fame.

Essential Playlist

On Your Own
Paradise Lost

I Don't Need No Doctor
Performance – Rockin' The Fillmore

I Walk On Gilded Splinters
Performance – Rockin' The Fillmore

Baby, I Love Your Way
Frampton

Penny For Your Thoughts
Frampton

Wind Of Change
Frampton Comes Alive!

Show Me The Way
Frampton Comes Alive!

Doobie Way
Frampton Comes Alive!

I Wanna Go To The Sun
Frampton Comes Alive!

Do You Feel Like We Do?
Frampton Comes Alive!

Signed, Sealed, Delivered
I'm In You

Breaking All The Rules
Breaking All The Rules

Know So Well
Premonition

Cornerstones
Fingerprints

Boot It Up
Fingerprints

Off The Hook
Peter Frampton

Out Of The Blue
Peter Frampton

If You Want Me To Stay
Frampton Forgets The Words

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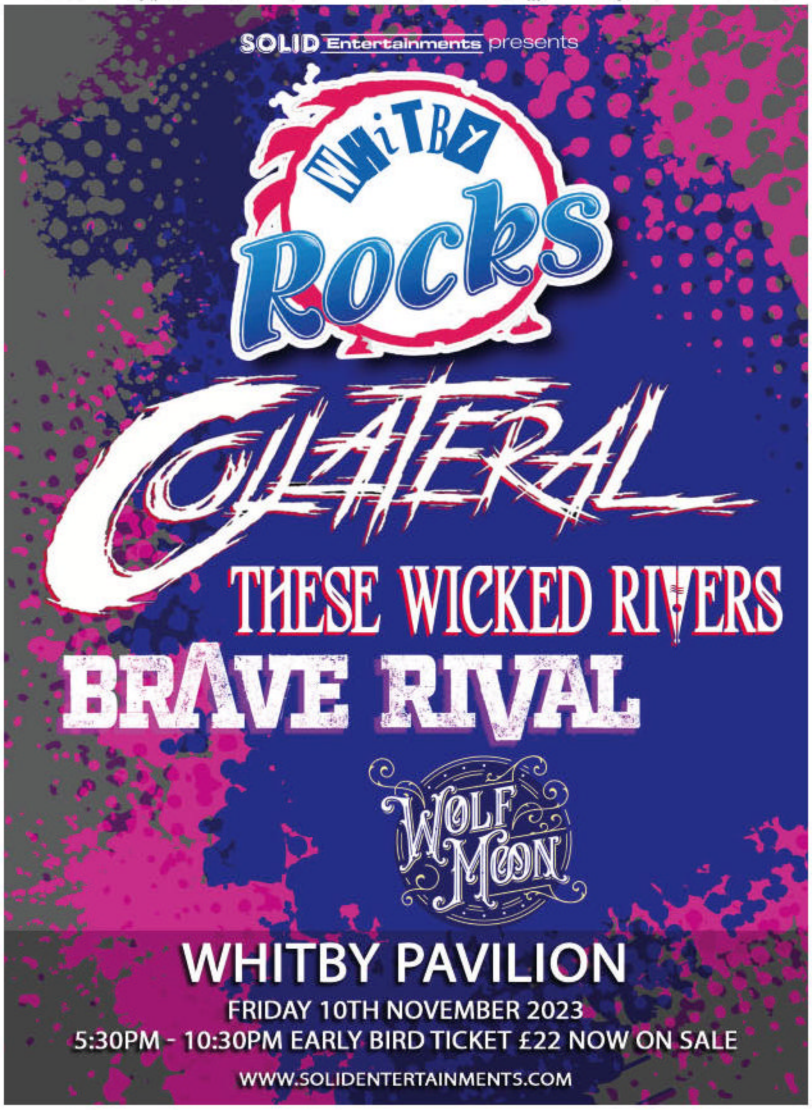

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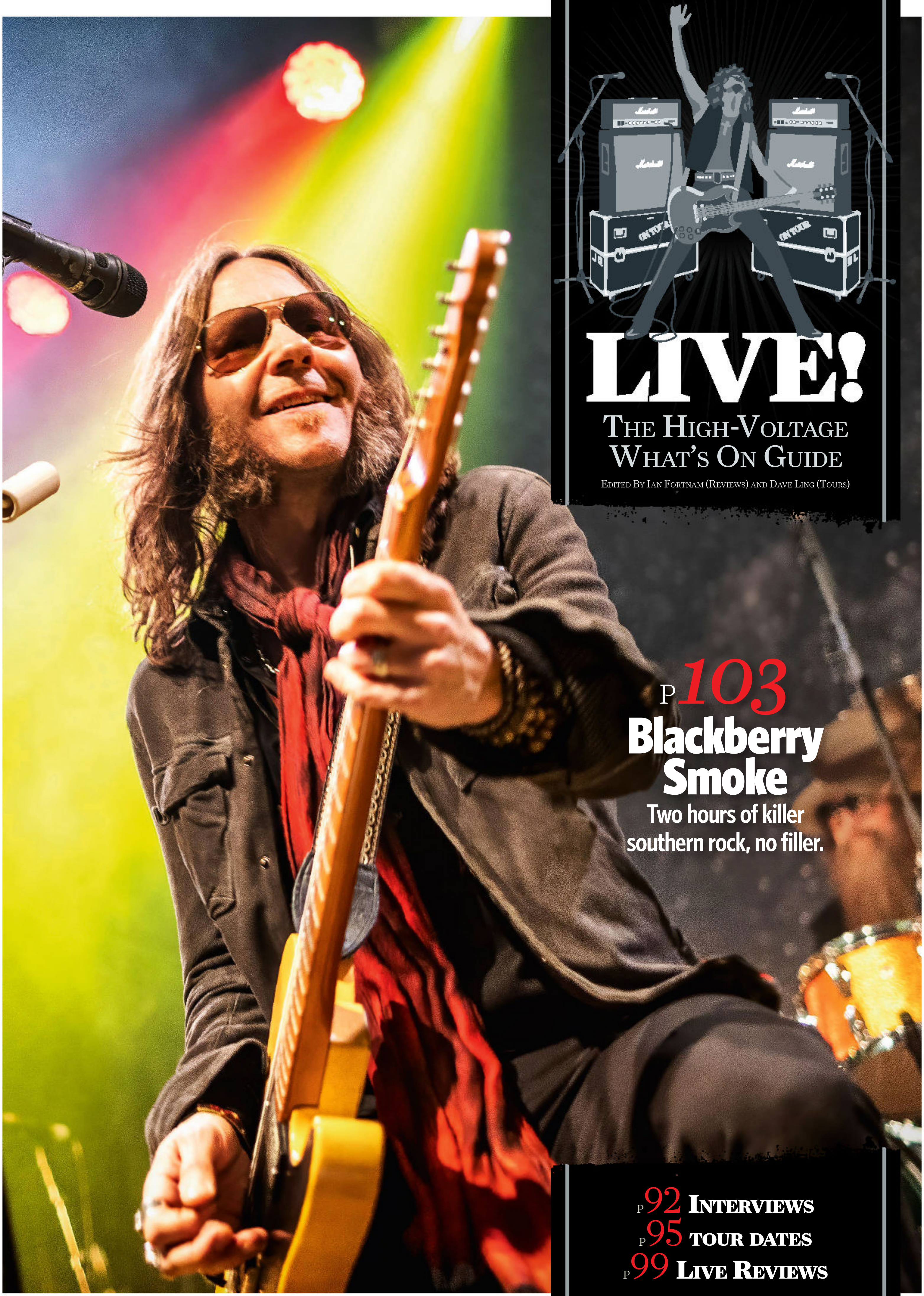

LIVE!

The High-Voltage What's On Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam (Reviews) and Dave Ling (Tours)

P103

Blackberry Smoke

Two hours of killer southern rock, no filler.

P92 Interviews
P95 Tour Dates
P99 Live Reviews

ALAMY

> "Somebody likes what I do – I've sold nine million records. The detractors can say what they want. These days I'm a lot more comfortable with myself."

Joe Bonamassa

The bluesman plays UK shows in May, and his whole catalogue is up for grabs for the set-lists.

New Yorker Joe Bonamassa's career began at the age of 12 when he opened for blues great BB King. Now in his mid-forties, the three-times Grammy-nominated guitarist and singer runs a record label, a management company, a charitable foundation and an all-star cruise. He is, in short, a modern-day king of the blues.

Your new live album *Tales Of Time* was recorded and filmed at Colorado's Red Rocks Ampitheatre. Does such an inspiring location make you up your game in any way?
Not really. Every artist who goes there knows it's a special place in the world, and I had played Red Rocks before. I'm not sure how many of those live performances we will be filming, because they cost as much as a movie to make, and who's got a DVD player any more?

In terms of record releases you used to be extremely prolific. Now it seems you've slowed down a little.
We don't make records at the velocity we used to. A decade ago the music business was a whole different model. Now it's almost like the fifties because it's all about singles again. When I meet somebody now that has a major-label record deal I tell them: "Gee, I'm sorry for you."

Some detractors claimed you were *too* prolific. Do you care one bit about the haters?
[He shrugs] Somebody likes what I do – I've sold nine million records. The detractors can say what they want. These days I'm a lot more comfortable with myself. We live in a free world. Anybody can grab a guitar and microphone, record some songs and make their own record. The playing field is so much more open then when I started.

On *Tales Of Time* you perform your current album *Time Clocks* in its entirety. What kind of a set will you be doing on the upcoming tour?
We've been rehearsing the whole book [of my

JENISE JENSEN/PRESS

catalogue] – that's sixty or seventy tunes. We're changing three or four of them every night, which is great as it keeps the band from going on autopilot.

The press campaigns of just about every emerging blues artist of note seem to include a 'Bonamassa-approved' quote. Having been mentored by Danny Gatton from the age of 11, is it important for you to give a leg up for others?
I was mentored by Danny and BB [King], which makes me very fortunate. Because of that, after being so successful for the past twenty years, yeah, I do feel the need to take it forward. If anybody has a question about merch or touring, I'm happy to give you the entire playbook. Just ask… I'll show you how *we* did it.

Your podcast *Live From Nerdville* is always worth a listen. Recent guests include Robin Trower, with whom you had a fascinating conversation about post-covid touring. Robin still hasn't picked up the pieces, but you wasted no time at all.
We returned in May of 2021 via gigs with reduced audiences, which to be honest was nuts. From August of that year we picked up full capacity and have never looked back.

Tell us about some guests on the podcast.
The first was Paul Stanley, and there are now about seventy-five of them. I like to do 'non-interviews' – my guests and I get on Zoom and talk through five or six bullet points. I just wind them up and let them go. If you're interviewing George Thorogood, all you need is two good questions – he does the rest.

On your travels have you met anybody capable of 'out-geeking' you on the subjects of guitars and music?
Oh, look… there are tons of people that make me look like a hobbyist. I'll tell you the craziest anorak I've met, and it's Rick Nielsen from Cheap Trick. What he doesn't know isn't worth knowing.

Some people might not be aware that as an eighteen-year-old you came very close to joining UFO.
Yeah, I auditioned for them. I went to Pete Way's house in Columbus, Ohio, and jammed with him – may he rest in peace – and the great Jerry Shirley [best known as the drummer with Humble Pie]. It was a fun experience. But Vinnie [Moore] was far better suited for UFO. It worked out best for everybody concerned that he got the gig instead of me.

What's the latest with the new Black Country Communion album?
Yeah, we're getting the band back together [chuckles]. We have no songs yet, but Glenn [Hughes] and I have a writing session booked for the week of April 10. Later on we aim to record over ten days in Los Angeles.

Glenn also has a solo tour, with dates here in the UK in the autumn. Is there a small window to accommodate a handful of BCC live dates?
Everybody is busy, but yeah, we've spoken about it and there will be a couple of shows. We owe it to ourselves for it to happen, because when that band works it's unique. **DL**

Bonamassa's begins in Bournemouth on May 9.

KEVIN NIXON

Corrosion Of Conformity

Pepper Keenan and co's UK tour continues until May 1.

As the North Carolina-based metalheads continue to lick their wounds following the loss of co-founding drummer Reed Mullin, vocalist and rhythm guitarist Pepper Keenan previews the band's six-date British and Irish tour.

In 2015 you returned to COC after a six-year absence. What prompted you to go back?
In this thing we call rock'n'roll I've given up asking the question: "Why?" It was just timing. We got together again and it worked out great. We don't plan this stuff out, man.

The response to COC's 2018 comeback album, *No Cross No Crown*, was very positive. Having written most of the lyrics and been heavily involved in the music, was it fairly easy to slot back into the group's machinations?
Getting back on the horse is always simple. Me and Woody [Weatherman, guitar] have been friends for ever. We're in the same boat right now, as far as doing a record without Reed Mullin after he passed away [in 2020].

Around the time of the album's release, you told *Classic Rock* that Reed's temporary split from COC had been "way overblown", stating: "He didn't leave, he collapsed, he figured his shit out and was back within three shows". A year later, tragically he was dead.
I'd tried to block that out of my brain, man. But look… He had a condition [alcoholism]. We did everything we could, it was a trying time. We'd done the record and everyone was stoked, and then he was gone.

Fifty-three is too young an age to die.
He was a kid. But he was troubled. He couldn't escape those problems. But the only memories of Reed I keep in my brain are positive ones.

You have a New Orleans-based drummer called Stanton Moore playing on a new studio record that's in the preparation stages.
Yeah. Stanton played on a record we did called *In The Arms Of God* [2005]. It's one of my favourites of ours. Stanton is a wonderful percussionist, with a jazz background. But in terms of trying to replace Reed, it won't happen. We know that, so we ain't gonna try.

How soon can we expect the album?
We're going to keep on demoing until we get to where we want to be. We're not rushing. It's possible it could come out this year but that probably won't happen. The stuff we've demoed is great. Dude, this is going to be *fucked up*. [laughs].

Phil Anselmo and Rex Brown are tied up with the Pantera reunion, but after they're done with that might the sludge supergroup Down be reactivated?
It's all on the [to-do] list. When Phil came up with the Pantera thing, I thought: "I guess there won't be anything from Down for a couple of years." But he has said we should get together and jam. Getting the five of us in the same room takes some planning.

Have you seen any of the Pantera shows?
Oh yeah. COC played with Pantera at their first show, in Mexico City. I was on at the side of the stage; 80,000 cheering fans… Man, they did it.

Although you were not with COC for the very first DesertFest in London in 2012, you played it with them four years later. What's the appeal of the event, which celebrates stoner-rock, doom, psych and sludge?
[Shrugs] It's just cool. Our world isn't as big as people think it is. There's probably thirty bands at the top of their game and a lot of them will be at DesertFest. Thank God for real music. **DL**

The tour ends in Dublin on May 1.

Hawkwind

The space-rockers have touched down on Earth, playing UK shows up to August 28.

Still captaining the good ship Hawkwind at 81 years old, the indefatigable Dave Brock talks to *Classic Rock* about the band's tour to promote *The Future Never Waits*, their thirty-fifth studio album.

There's been a steady flow of music for the past few years, with two Hawkwind albums, another as the Hawkwind Light Orchestra, the double live album *We Are Looking In On You*, and the beautiful box *Days Of The Underground* that revisited the era of 1977-79.
Actually there's another on the way, a ten-disc collection of studio and live recordings from the late 1970s.

That's some impressive productivity.
[Announces with a theatrical flourish] It's a Hawkwind surge in my elder age. What on earth does it mean? Can I retire to Hawaii?

Maybe in a little while. But the question stands; most bands struggle to release an album a year.
Maybe they can't write as quickly as we do [laughs]. We've already got another one ready.

***The Future Never Waits* is a mostly instrumental and ambient collection. For example, *They Are So Easily Distracted* sounds a bit like lounge music.**
You are right, it does. That track started off being inspired by the Holodomor, a famine started by the Russians that killed a million and a half Ukrainians. This was back in the 1930s. So this [current war] is not a new thing. But the song started out too jolly, so in the end we made it darker.

Another track, *The Beginning*, paints a bleak futurist picture, with '*carbon-based humans*' having been '*phased out*', a few kept in captivity '*to be released back into the wild when it is deemed safe to do so*'.
All of these things we comment on are going on now. How many adverts do you see on the telly about saving up for your cremation? It's happening!

***Rama (The Prophecy)* is more like 'traditional' Hawkwind, were there such a thing.**
Yes, that's true. The song asks: is there going to be another messiah who comes down to save the world? Well, I'm here! Does nobody realise it's me?!

Can you talk us through a typical day on the band's farm in Devon?
That's hard, because it's not really a working farm. In fact we have five Ukrainians living with us. Their husbands are fighting on the frontline. But that's another story. Lots of my daily life involves chopping up wood, feeding the horse, and of course we grow our own veg.

The band play five UK dates in April, including a headline spot at the Prognosis Festival in London. Are you planning to play a decent number of the new tunes?
Yes we are, though of course we have to play the old favourites. Just like you I expect, I've been to too many concerts where the audience starts shifting in its seats when there are too many new numbers. It's all about striking the right balance.

You turn eighty-two in August and you're still touring. Is touring still fun?
Sometimes. It all depends on where we're going. We did enjoy a festival we did recently up in Morecambe. At an Italian one we did, the place we stayed in in Milan was called The Emotional Hotel, with all of these themed rooms. Ours was Moroccan. Some rooms had handcuffs. That was interesting [laughs].

You must be pretty sick of being asked whether you are ever going to retire, but the question stands. Do you have any plans to?
I do wish I could go backwards in time instead of forwards. I've started to get cramp in my fingers because we play for two hours. I spoke to John Etheridge [guitarist with Soft Machine] about it. Arthur Brown agrees with me that the older you get, the more bodily problems start to arise. But no, while it stays fun I don't plan on stopping. **DL**

Hawkwind are on the road until late August.

MARIANNE HARRIS/PRESS

Tour Dates

AIRBOURNE

Manchester	Academy	Jul 22
Maidstone	Maid Of Stone Festival	Jul 23
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jul 25
London	Kentish Town Forum	Jul 27
Glasgow	QMU	Jul 31

THE ALMIGHTY, BALAAM & THE ANGEL

Glasgow	Barrowland	Nov 30
Manchester	Academy	Dec 1
London	Kentish Town Forum	Dec 2

THE ANCHORESS

Durham	Northern Kin Festival	Apr 30
Huddersfield	The Parish	May 1
Guildford	Boileroom	May 9
Brighton	Komedia	May 10
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 12
Manchester	Deaf Institute	May 13
Hebden Bridge	Trades Club	May 14
Gloucester	Guildhall	May 17
Birmingham	Academy	May 18
London	Queen Elizabeth Hall	May 20
Bristol	Thekla	May 21
Liverpool	Leaf	Sep 21
Edinburgh	Summerhall	Sep 22
Hull	Central Library	Sep 23
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Sep 24
Cardiff	Acapella	Sep 30
Cambridge	Junction	Oct 4

JON ANDERSON & THE PAUL GREEN ROCK ACADEMY

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jul 22

THE ARISTOCRATS

Glasgow	Garage	Jun 12
Newcastle	NUSU	Jun 13
Coventry	Empire	Jun 14
Bristol	The Fleece	Jun 15
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jun 16
Manchester	Academy 2	Jun 17
Dublin	Opium	Jun 18

BALAAM & THE ANGEL

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Oct 13

BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE

Sittingbourne	Bourne Music Club	Apr 27
Poynton	Bluefunk Club	Apr 29
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Apr 30
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	May 2
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	May 3
Lincoln	Blues Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 6
Brecon	The Muse	May 7
Leamington Spa	Temperance Bar	May 8
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 9
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts	Jun 29

JEFF BECK TRIBUTE CONCERTS

London	Royal Albert Hall	May 22, 23

ERIC BIBB

Basingstoke	The Anvil	May 3
Pontardawe	Arts Centre	May 4
Birmingham	Town Hall	May 5
Wimborne	Tivoli Theatre	May 6
Bury St Edmunds	Apex	May 8
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	May 9
London	King's Cross King's Place	May 11
Frome	Cheese & Grain	May 13
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	May 14
Edinburgh	Queen's Hall	May 16
Glasgow	St Luke's Church	May 17
Manchester	Stoller Hall	May 19
Leeds	City Varieties	May 20
Whitley Bay	Playhouse	May 22
Wavendon	The Stables	May 23
Belfast	Mandela Hall	May 25
Dublin	Liberty Hall	May 26
Limerick	Dolans	May 28
Cork	Cyprus Avenue	May 29

Recommended

BIG BIG TRAIN, DIM GRAY

Edinburgh	Queen's Hall	Sep 10
Birmingham	Town Hall	Sep 11
London	Cadogan Hall	Sep 12, 13

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

THE BLACK KEYS

London	O2 Arena	Jun 21
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 22
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 24

BLACK SPIDERS, THE HOT DAMN!

Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Sep 15
London	New Cross Inn	Sep 16
Portsmouth	Moonshine	Sep 17
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Sep 18
Leeds	Warehouse	Sep 19
Chester	Live Rooms	Sep 21
Glasgow	Garage (Attic)	Sep 22
Newcastle	Anarchy Brewery	Sep 23
Crumlin	The Patriot	Sep 24
Plymouth	Junction	Sep 25

BLINK 182, THE STORY SO FAR

Glasgow	The Hydro	Sep 2
Belfast	SSE Arena	Sep 4
Dublin	3Arena	Sep 5
London	O2 Arena	Oct 11, 12
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 14
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 15

THE BLOCKHEADS

Cambridge	Junction	May 5
Birmingham	The Crossing	May 6
London	Gt Portland St 229 Club	May 12
Northampton	Roadmender	May 13

JOE BONAMASSA

Bournemouth	BIC	May 9
Blackpool	Opera House	May 10
Leeds	First Direct Arena	May 12
Newcastle	Utilita Arena	May 13
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	May 14

BRAVE RIVAL

Emsworth	Kings Arms	May 6
Bosworth	Blues Festival	May 7
Farnham	Maltings	May 18
London	Chelsea Blues Festival	May 21
Leamington Spa	Temperance	May 22
Stockton-on-Tees	Blues On The Bay	May 26
Saltburn	New Marske Institute	May 27
Maryport	Grasslot Club	May 28
London	Buck Moon Festival	Jul 8
Darlington	R&B Club	Jul 14
Newcastle	The Cluny	Aug 11
Dudley	Lamp Tavern	Sep 1
Tring	Blues Bar	Sep 7
Cranbrook	Town Music Festival	Sep 9
Manchester	Academy 3	Sep 15
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Sep 19
Leicester	The Musician	Sep 22
Wolverhampton	NWOCR Festival	Sep 23
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts	Oct 5
Carlisle	Blues Festival	Oct 7
Worthing	The Factory	Oct 12
Beer	Blues Festival	Oct 14

BRITISH LION, STRAY

Manchester	Rebellion	Jun 29
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jul 2

DANNY BRYANT

Hartlepool	South Durham WMC	May 27

CARDINAL BLACK

Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 4
Hull	The Social	May 5
Glasgow	Room 2	May 6
Newcastle	Anarchy Brewing Co	May 7
Chepstow	Castle	Aug 24

ELIANA CARGNELUTTI

Barnoldswick	Music & Arts	Oct 4
Leamington Spa	Temperance	Oct 5
Looe	Cornwall Rocks Festival	Oct 6
Dudley	Lamp Tavern	Oct 7
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Oct 8

CATS IN SPACE

Bracknell	South Hills Park Wilde Theatre	Jul 20
Lancaster	Grand Theatre	Jul 21
Hexham	Queens Theatre	Jul 22
Stockport	Forum Theatre	Sep 8
Bathgate	Reconnect Regal Theatre	Sep 9
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Sep 15
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Sep 23
Southend-on-Sea	Palace Theatre	Sep 26
Redditch	Palace Theatre	Sep 29
Paignton	Palace Theatre	Sep 30
Wimborne	Tivoli Theatre	Nov 9
Ilfracombe	Landmark Theatre	Nov 10
Maidenhead	Norden Farm	Nov 11
Southampton	The Brook	Dec 14
Wavendon	The Stables	Dec 15
Swansea	Patti Pavilions	Dec 16

COHEED AND CAMBRIA

Glasgow	SWG3 Galvanizers	Jun 11
London	Kentish Town Forum	Jun 13

ROCK RECOMMENDS

STEELHOUSE

Airbourne (pictured), Black Stone Cherry and Kris Barras head the line-up making a rockin' racket in Wales this summer.

Ebbw Vale	Hafod-y-Dafal Farm	Jul 28-30

HUGH CORNWELL

Birmingham	Institute	May 5
Manchester	Academy	May 6
Sheffield	Academy	May 7

CORROSION OF CONFORMITY

Dublin	Academy	May 1
Glasgow	Garage	May 2
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 3
Cardiff	The Globe	May 4
Manchester	Bread Shed	May 5
London	Camden Desertfest	May 6

CROW BLACK CHICKEN

Chester	Live Rooms	May 12
Stockton	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 13

THE CULT

Cardiff	Castle	Jul 4
Halifax	Piece Hall	Jul 5
Scarborough	Open Air Theatre	Jul 6

THE DAMN TRUTH

London	Islington Academy	Jul 21
Shoreham-by-Sea	Ropetackle Arts	Jul 22
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Jul 23
Leicester	The Musician	Jul 25
Buckley	Tivoli	Jul 27
Leek	Foxlowe Arts	Jul Fri 28
Ebbw Vale	Steelhouse Festival	Jul 29
Sheffield	The Greystones	Jul 30
Wavendon	The Stables	Aug 1

DEAD KENNEDYS

Southampton	1865	May 5
Bristol	SWX	May 6
Birmingham	Academy	May 7
Norwich	Waterfront	May 9
Manchester	Academy	May 10
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	May 12
Glasgow	Garage	May 13
Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	May 14
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	May 16
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	May 17

DEF LEPPARD, MÖTLEY CRÜE

Sheffield	Bramall Lane	May 22
London	Wembley Stadium	Jul 1
Lancashire	Lytham Festival	Jul 2
Dublin	Marlay Park	Jul 4
Glasgow	Hampden Park	Jul 6

DEPECHE MODE

London	Twickenham Stadium	Jun 17

DEVO

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Aug 19

DIAMOND HEAD

Liverpool	Invisible Wind Factory	May 6
Durham	Dominion Festival	May 7

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Sep 12
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Sep 14
Liverpool	M&S Bank Arena	Sep 16
London	Royal Albert Hall	Sep 18

ELIXIR, TRESPASS

London	Stratford Cart & Horses	May 27

EMPYRE

Swansea	Station 18 Festival	Apr 30
Kettering	Arts Centre	May 20
Bournemouth	Loverocks Festival	Jun 2, 3
Ebbw Vale	Steelhouse Festival	Jul 30

EUROPE

Cardiff	St David's Hall	Oct 17
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Oct 18
Gateshead	The Sage	Oct 19
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Oct 21
Salford	The Lowry	Oct 22
Leicester	De Montfort Hall	Oct 24
London	Palladium	Oct 25, 16

EXCITER

London	Tufnell Park Dome	Jun 3

FALL OUT BOY, PVRIS

Leeds	First Direct Arena	Oct 27
Glasgow	The Hydro	Oct 28
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 29
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 31
London	O2 Arena	Nov 2, 3
Cardiff	Internernational Arena	Nov 4

SAMANTHA FISH, JESSE DAYTON

Sunderland	The Fire Station	Oct 19
Glasgow	Barrowland	Oct 20
Manchester	The Ritz	Oct 21
Bristol	SWX	Oct 22
York	Barbican	Oct 24
Cambridge	Junction	Oct 25
Bournemouth	Academy	Oct 26
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Oct 27
Birmingham	Institute	Oct 28

FM, TYKETTO, DARE

Glasgow	Garage	May 11
Newcastle	Riverside	May 12
Nottingham	Rock City	May 13
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	May 14
Hull	The Welly	May 16
Buckley	Tivoli	May 18
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 19
Newport	The Neon	May 20
Manchester	Academy 2	May 21
Southampton	1865	May 23
Norwich	Epic Studios	May 24
London	Islington Academy	May 25

FOCUS

New Brighton	Floral Pavilion	Jun 28
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Jun 29
Tavistock	The Wharf	Jun 30
Surrey	Alford Rock & Blues Festival	Jul 1

JOHN FOGERTY, HEARTY HAR

Manchester	AO Arena	May 25
London	O2 Arena	May 29

CHRIS FRANTZ & TINA WEYMOUTH

Oxford	Sheldonian Theatre	May 25
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	May 27
Leeds	Brundell Social Club	May 28

HENRIK FREISCHLADER

Worthing	Factory	May 2
Manchester	Academy 3	May 3
Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	May 4

KATIA OGRIN

BACK TO LIVE

Hartlepool	South Durham Social Club	May 5
Lincoln	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 6
Bilston	Robin 2	May 7
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 9

FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND

Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Oct 7
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 8
Leeds	Academy	Oct 9
Birmingham	Academy	Oct 11
Norwich	UEA	Oct 13
Cardiff	International Arena	Oct 14
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Oct 15

PETER GABRIEL

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jun 17
London	O2 Arena	Jun 19
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Jun 20
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 22
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 23
Dublin	3 Arena	Jun 25

GENERATION SEX

London	Crystal Palace Park	Jul 1
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Jul 10

BILLY F GIBBONS

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jul 2
Birmingham	Academy	Jul 3
Bournemouth	Academy	Jul 11

Recommended

GINGER PLAYS THE WILDHEARTS (UNPLUGGED)

Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Apr 28
Guildford	Boileroom	Apr 30
Chesterfield	Real Time	May 7
Bradford	Nightrain	May 12
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 21
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jun 9
London	West Hampstead Arts Club	Jun 17, 22
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jul 8
Sheffield	The Greystones	Sep 22

TO BE RETAINED ... ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

GOO GOO DOLLS, THOSE DAMN CROWS

Dublin	Vicar St	Jun 13
Birmingham	Institute	Jun 15
Bristol	Academy	Jun 16
Bournemouth	Academy	Jun 17
Nottingham	Rock City	Jun 19
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 20
Sheffield	Academy	Jun 22
Manchester	Academy	Jun 23
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jun 24

MYKE GRAY'S SKIN

Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Aug 18
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Aug 19
Gravesend	Red Lion	Aug 20

KEN PUSTELNIK'S GROUNDHOGS

Kendall	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 27
Glasgow	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 28
Grimsby	Yardbirds	May 29
Penzance	The Acorn	Aug 12

GRYPHON

Runcorn	Bridnley	May 4
Bury	The Met	May 5
Cromer	Folk On The Pier	May 6
Sheffield	Leadmill	May 10
Cambridge	Junction	May 11
Canterbury	Gulbunkian	Jun 9
Hove	Old Market	Jun 10

GUN

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 5

GUNS N' ROSES

Glasgow	Bellahouston Park	Jun 27
London	Hyde Park BST Festival	Jun 30

DARRYL HALL, TODD RUNDGREN

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jul 9

STEVE HARLEY'S ACOUSTIC BAND

Cardiff	Acapela Studio	May 13-15
Sheffield	Memorial	May 18
Liverpool	Epstein Theatre	May 19
Harpenden	Eric Morecambe Centre	May 20
Shrewsbury	Theatre Severn	May 21
London	Pizza Express Live	May 26, 27
Exeter	Corn Exchange	Jun 1
Frome	Memorial Theatre	Jun 2
Stroud	Subscription Rooms	Jun 3
Hayes	Beck Theatre	Jun 8
Aldershot	Prince's Hall	Jun 9
Harrogate	Theatre	Jun 10
Morecambe	The Platform	Jun 15
Barrow-in-Furness	Forum	Jun 16
Sunderland	Fire Station	Jun 17

Lowther	Pavilion	Jun 19
King's Lynn	Corn Exchange	Jun 29
Newark	Palace	Jun 30
Blackburn	King George's Hall	Jul 1

HAWKWIND

Manchester	Academy	Apr 28
Nottingham	Rock City	Apr 29
Durham	Northern Kin Festival	Apr 30
Truro	Hall For Cornwall	Jun 16
Chepstow	Castle	Aug 28

HEAVY PETTIN, GLASGOW, LYIN' RAMPANT

Glasgow	Classic Grand	Sep 30

HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES, THE TUBES, SEETHER

Scarborough	Open Air Theatre	Jul 5
Swansea	Arena	Jul 7
Manchester	AO Arena	Jul 8
London	O2 Arena	Jul 9
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 11
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 12

CHRIS HOLMES

Newport	The Patriot	Jun 16
Buckley	Tivoli	Jun 17
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jun 18
Newcastle	Trillians	Jun 22
Northampton	Black Prince	Jun 23
London	Tufnell Park Boston Music Room	Jun 24
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Jun 25

THE HU

Southampton	Guildhall	Jun 10
Donington Park	Download Festival	Jun 11
Liverpool	Academy	Jun 13
Bristol	Academy	Jun 14
Norwich	UEA	Jun 21
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 22
Newcastle	NX	Jun 23

GLENN HUGHES, THE DAMN TRUTH

Norwich	Waterfront	Jul 19
Northampton	Roadmender	Jul 21
Maidstone	Maid Of Stone Festival	Jul 22
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Oct 10
Southampton	1865	Oct 12
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Oct 13
Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 15
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Oct 17
Glasgow	QMU	Oct 20
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 21
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Oct 23
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Oct 25
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Oct 28
Manchester	Academy	Oct 29

INCUBUS

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jun 23
Cornwall	Eden Sessions	Jun 24

IRON MAIDEN

Dublin	3 Arena	Jun 24
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 26
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Jun 28
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 30
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Jul 3
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 4
London	O2 Arena	Jul 7, 8

JETHRO TULL

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	May 23

ELTON JOHN

London	O2 Arena	Jun 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, May 30
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Apr 19
Manchester	AO Arena	May 31, Jun 2, 3
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Jun 6
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jun 8, 10, 11
Aberdeen	PJ Live	Jun 13, 15
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 17, 18

ROBERT JON & THE WRECK

Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Sep 13
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Sep 14
Manchester	Academy	Sep 15
Liverpool	Academy	Sep 16
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Sep 17
Glasgow	St Luke's	Sep 19
Leeds	Wardrobe	Sep 20
Bristol	Thekla	Sep 21
Cambridge	Junction	Sep 22
Southampton	The Brook	Sep 23

LAURENCE JONES

Cork	Rory Gallagher Festival	Jun 2
Worthing	The Factory	Jun 29
Alford	Rock & Blues Festival	Jun 30

KIRA MAC

Chester	Live Rooms	May 17
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 18
Glasgow	G2	May 19
Sheffield	Corporation	May 21

ROCK RECOMMENDS

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

You can't beat a bit of The Boss. Catch him and his jewel-box song catalogue in a stadium or park near you soon.

See opposite page for dates. Currently May 5 to July 8.

KEVIN NIXON

Southampton	1865	May 30
Bristol	Thekla	May 31
Birmingham	Asylum	Jun 2
Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	Jun 3
London	Highbury Garage	Jun 4

JIM KIRKPATRICK

Raynes Park	Cavern	May 4
Poynton	Blue Funk	May 5
Market Bosworth	Rockers Reunited Festival	May 7
Cleveland	Blues At The Bay	Jul 7

KISS, SKINDRED, THE WILD THINGS

Plymouth	Argyle Home Park	Jun 3
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Jun 5
Newcastle	Utilita Arena	Jun 6
London	O2 Arena	Jul 5
Manchester	AO Arena	Jul 7
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 8

KOSSOFF… THE BAND PLAYS ON

Leicester	The Musician	Jun 22
Chelmsford	Social Club	Jun 23
Wavendon	The Stables	Jun 24
London	Putney Half Moon	Jun 25, Oct 15
Gravesend	Red Lion	Jul 7
Ramsgate	Red Arrows Music Club	Jul 11
Leicester	The Musician	Aug 30
Wimborne	Tivoli Theatre	Aug 31
Wokingham	Music Club	Sep 1
Raynes Park	The Cavern	Oct 12

LARKIN POE

Bristol	Academy	Oct 17
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 18
Manchester	Albert Hall	Oct 20
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Oct 21

JOHN LEES' BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST

Leeds	City Varieties	May 23
London	Islington Assembly Hall	May 28

THE LEMON TWIGS

Brighton	Chalk	May 27
Bristol	SWX	May 28
Glasgow	SWG3	May 29
Manchester	New Century Hall	May 31
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Jun 1

THE LONG RYDERS

Leamington Spa	The Assembly	May 19
London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	May 20
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 21
Glasgow	Oran More	May 22
Liverpool	The Cavern	May 23
Bristol	The Fleece	May 24
Brighton	Patterns	May 25

LOVE FEATURING JOHNNY ECHOLS

Manchester	Band On The Wall	Jun 30
Liverpool	Academy	Jul 1
York	Crescent	Jul 2
Glasgow	Mono	Jul 3
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jul 5
Birmingham	Academy	Jul 7
Oxford	Academy	Jul 8
Bristol	Academy	Jul 9
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Jul 10
Bournemouth	Academy	Jul 12

Brighton	Concorde 2	Jul 13
Bedford	Esquires	Jul 14
London	Highbury Garage	Jul 15

THE MARS VOLTA, THE GENDER BENDER

Glasgow	Barrowland	Jun 16
Manchester	Apollo	Jun 17
London	Limehouse Troxy	Jun 18

RICHARD MARX (2024)

London	Royal Albert Hall	May 22

CHANTEL McGREGOR

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 4
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	May 5
Bosworth	Blues Festival	May 6
Rotherham	Parkgate Brewery Tap	May 13
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	May 17
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	May 26
Glasgow	Classic Grand	May 27
Aberdeen	Café Drummond	May 28
Leamington Spa	Temperance	Jun 1
Worthing	Factory	Jun 2
Silsden	Town Hall	Jun 17
Alford	Blues Festival	Jun 2
Maidstone	Maid Of Stone Festival	Jul 23
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Sep 7
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Sep 8
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	Sep 9
Cannock	The Station	Oct 13
Morecambe	The Platform	Oct 21
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts	Nov 27

MELVINS

Bristol	The Exchange	May 30
Glasgow	Garage	Jun 1
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Jun 2
Leeds	Stylus	Jun 3
Manchester	Gorilla	Jun 4
Birmingham	Institute 2	Jun 5
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Jun 6

MIDNIGHT CITY, STAR CIRCUS

Birmingham	Billesley Rock Club	Jun 2
Swansea	Bunkhouse	Jun 16
London	Camden Black Heart	Jun 17
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Jun 23
Leicester	HRH AOR Festival	Jun 24
Bradford	Nightrain	Jun 30
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Jul 1

MIKE + THE MECHANICS

Buxton	Opera House	Apr 28
Northampton	Derngate	Apr 30
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 1
Hull	City Hall	May 2
Bath	Forum	May 4
Basingstoke	The Anvil	May 5
Bournemouth	Pavilion	May 7
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	May 8
Cardiff	St David's Hall	May 10
Swansea	Arena	May 11
Eastbourne	Congress Theatre	May 12
Plymouth	Pavilions	May 14
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	May 16
Oxford	New Theatre	May 17
London	Royal Albert Hall	May 18
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 20
Milton Keynes	Theatre	May 21

Llandudno	Venue Cymru	May 22
Guildford	G Live	May 24
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	May 25
Reading	Hexagon	May 26
Portsmouth	Guildhall	May 28

MOLLY HATCHET

Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Jun 29
Buckley	Tivoli	Jul 1
Bradford	Nightrain	Jul 2
Bilston	Robin 2	Jul 4
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Jul 5
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Jul 6
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Jul 7

IAN MOSS

Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Jun 1
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jun 2
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Jun 3
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jun 7
Manchester	Dead Institute	Jun 9
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Jun 10

MUSE

Plymouth	Home Park	May 27
Huddersfield	John Smith's Stadium	Jun 20
Glasgow	Bellahouston Park	Jun 23
Milton Keynes	National Bowl	Jun 25

NAZARETH

Dunfermline	Alhambra Theatre	Apr 29
Elgin	MacMoray Festival	Apr 30

OZRIC TENTACLES, GONG

Oxford	Academy 2	Nov 17
London	Kentish Town Forum	Nov 18
Manchester	The Ritz	Nov 19
Sheffield	Academy 2	Nov 20
Colchester	Arts Centre	Nov 21
Northampton	Roadmender	Nov 23
Bristol	Academy	Nov 24
Gloucester	Guildhall	Nov 25
Birmingham	Academy 2	Nov 26
Brighton	Chalk	Nov 28
Norwich	Epic Studios	Nov 29
Bournemouth	Academy	Nov 30
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Dec 1
Liverpool	Academy	Dec 2

Recommended

DAN PATLANSKY

Glasgow	Stereo	May 12
Cardiff	The Globe	May 13
Sheffield	Greystones	May 14
Newcastle	The Cluny	May 16
Manchester	Deaf Institute	May 17
Southampton	1865	May 18
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	May 19
London	Camden Powerhaus	May 20

JIZZY PEARL'S LOVE/HATE, DIG LAZARUS

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 1
Great Yarmouth	Hard Rock Hell Fest	Nov 2
Buckley	Tivoli	Nov 3
Crumlin	The Patriot	Nov 4
London	Camden Underworld	Nov 5

PORCUPINE TREE

Manchester	Castlefield Bowl	Jun 29

PRAYING MANTIS

Raynes Park	The Cavern	Nov 23
Cannock	The Station	Nov 24

PUSCIFER

Dublin	Olympia	Jun 10
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 12
Manchester	Academy	Jun 13
London	Venue TBA	Jun 15

KEN PUSTELNIK'S GROUNDHOGS

Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	May 29
Penzance	The Acorn	Aug 12

SUZI QUATRO

Cardiff	St David's Hall	Nov 12
Brighton	Dome	Nov 13
London	Palladium	Nov 15
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Nov 16
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Nov 18

THE QUIREBOYS

Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Apr 28
Chesterfield	Real Time	Apr 29
Cardiff	Clwb Ifor Bach	May 4
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	May 5
Norwich	Waterfront Studio	May 6
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 11
Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 12
Newcastle	The Cluny	May 13

Manchester	Night & Day Café	May 18
Birmingham	Castle & Falcon	May 19
Bristol	The Exchange	May 20
London	Kentish Town Forum	Sep 2

FÉLIX RABIN

Kinross	Green Hotel	Nov 19
Sheffield	Greystones	Nov 22
Cardiff	Acapella Studios	Nov 30

BONNIE RAITT

Dublin	Vicar Street	Jun 1
London	Palladium	Jun 3
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Jun 6
Oxford	New Theatre	Jun 7
Gateshead	The Sage	Jun 9
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 11
Manchester	Bridgwater Hall	Jun 14
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Jun 15
Kent	Black Deer Festival	Jun 17

RANCID, THE BRONX, GRADE 2

London	Brixton Academy	Jun 20
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jun 21

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

London	Tottenham Hotspur Stadium	Jul 21
Glasgow	Hampden Park	Jul 23

REZILLOS, THE PROFESSIONALS

Sheffield	Leadmill	Oct 27
Manchester	Rebellion	Oct 28
Cambridge	Junction	Nov 3
Leamington Spa	The Assembly	Nov 4
Gillingham	Great Hall	Nov 17
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Nov 18

ROMEO'S DAUGHTER, SWEET CRISIS

London	Highbury Garage	Sep 23

THE STEVE ROTHERY BAND, I AM THE MORNING

Manchester	Band On The Wall	Jun 9, 10

ROYAL BLOOD

Nottingham	Rock City	May 26
Newcastle	City Hall	Jun 21
Brighton	Beach	Jul 29

JOE SATRIANI

Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 12
Gateshead	The Sage	May 13
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 14
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	May 16
Glasgow	Academy	May 17

SARI SCHORR, MATT PEARCE & THE MUTINY

York	Crescent	Oct 25
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Oct 26
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Oct 27
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	Oct 28
Leek	Foxlowe Arts	Oct 29
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	Oct 31
London	Highbury Garage	Nov 1
Gloucester	Guildhall	Nov 2
Birmingham	Castle & Falcon	Nov 3
Grimsby	Docks Academy	Nov 4

SKILLET, EVA UNDER FIRE

Manchester	Academy	Apr 14
London	Kentish Town Forum	Apr 15

SKINDRED

Northampton	Roadmender	Oct 6
Leeds	Academy	Oct 7
Cambridge	Junction	Oct 13
Norwich	Epic	Oct 14
Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 19
Brighton	Chalk	Oct 27
Sheffield	Leadmill	Nov 3
Lincoln	Engine Shed	Nov 4
Cardiff	Great Hall	Nov 10
Belfast	Limelight 2	Nov 17
Dublin	Academy	Nov 18

SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY & THE ASBURY JUKES

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jul 7

SPARKS

Oxford	New Theatre	May 23
Liverpool	Royal Philharmonic Hall	May 24
Glasgow	SEC Armadillo	May 26
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 27
London	Royal Albert Hall	May 29, 30

AN EVENING WITH SPIKE

Hull	Wrecking Ball	May 17
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	May 18
Glasgow	Hard Rock Café	May 19
Leicester	The Musician	Jun 3
Helmsley	Farmyard Party	Jun 17
Bilston	Robin 2	Nov 30
Bathgate	Dreadnought	Dec 2
Bradford	Nightrain	Dec 16

SUZI QUATRO

Devil Gate Drive! *48 Crash*! *Can The* freakin' *Can*! Those three alone are worth the price of admission. Get in!

See below for dates. Currently November 12 to November 18.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND

Dublin	RDS Arena	May 5, 7
Edinburgh	Murrayfield Stadium	May 30
Birmingham	Villa Park	Jun 16
London	Hyde Park BST Festival	Jul 6, 8

SPIRITBOX, LOATHE, BRAND OF SACRIFICE

Birmingham	Institute	Jul 5
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jul 6
Glasgow	Barrowland	Jul 7
Belfast	Limelight	Jul 9
Dublin	Academy	Jul 10
Bristol	Academy	Jul 12
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Jul 13, 14

STEEL PANTHER, WINGER

Glasgow	Academy	May 14
Newcastle	City Hall	May 15
Manchester	Academy	May 17
Birmingham	Academy	May 18
London	Kentish Town Forum	May 20
Bristol	Academy	May 21
Leeds	Academy	May 23
Belfast	Ulster Hall	May 25
Cork	Cyprus Avenue	May 26
Dublin	Vicar Street	May 28

ROD STEWART

Plymouth	Home Park Stadium	Jun 24
Northampton	Cinch Stadium	Jun 28
Durham	Riverside	Jun 30
Bristol	Badminton Estate	Jul 2
Hull	Craven Park	Jul 4
Edinburgh	Castle	Jul 6

STRAY

Hull	Wrecking Ball	Jun 16
Helmsley	Farmyard Party	Jun 17
Gravesend	Red Lion	Sep 15

GEOFF TATE, DAXX & ROXANNE

Sheffield	Corporation	Jun 14
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jun 15
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	Jun 16
Newport	The Moon	Jun 17
London	Highbury Garage	Jun 18
Bradford	Nightrain	Jun 20
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Jun 21
Buckley	Tivoli	Jun 22
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jun 23
Belfast	Mandela Hall	Jun 28
Dublin	Tramline	Jun 29

RICHARD THOMPSON

Edinburgh	Queens Hall	Jun 18
Newcastle	Tyne Theatre & Opera House	Jun 19
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Jun 21
Wolverhampton	Wulfrun Hall	Jun 23
Brighton	Dome	Jun 26
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Jun 27
London	Alexandra Palace	Jun 28

THRESHOLD, GRACE AND FIRE

London	Islington Academy	May 13

TIGERTAILZ, KICKIN' VALENTINA, STAR CIRCUS

London	Camden Underworld	Jun 3

TOYAH & ROBERT FRIPP'S SUNDAY LUNCH ROCK PARTY

Worcester	Huntingdon Hall	May 26, 27
Wimborne	Tivoli	Sep 30
Cheltenham	Town Hall	Oct 1
Harrogate	Royal Hall	Oct 7
Whitley	Bay Playhouse	Oct 8
Salford	The Lowry	Oct 9
Worthing	Assembly Hall	Oct 14
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Oct 16
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Oct 19
Basingstoke	The Anvil	Oct 20
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Oct 21
Buxton	Opera House	Oct 25
Shrewsbury	Theatre Severn	Oct 26
Swansea	Grand Theatre	Oct 28
Birmingham	Town Hall	Oct 29

MIKE TRAMP, THE SONGS OF WHITE LION

Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Aug 17
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Aug 18
Sheffield	Corporation	Aug 19
Crumlin	Patriot	Aug 20
Bradford	Nightrain	Aug 22
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Aug 23
Newcastle	The Cluny	Aug 24
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Aug 30
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Aug 31
London	Camden Assembly	Sep 1

TRIVIUM, BLEED FROM WITHIN, ORBIT CULTURE

Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Aug 23
Norwich	UEA	Aug 24
Nottingham	Rock City	Aug 25
Oxford	Academy	Aug 26
Hanley	Victoria Hall	Aug 28
Liverpool	Academy	Aug 29
Sheffield	Academy	Aug 30
Newcastle	NX	Aug 31
Edinburgh	Academy	Sep 2
Leeds	Stylus	Sep 3
Bristol	Academy	Sep 4
Folkestone	Leas Cliff Hall	Sep 6
Southampton	Guildhall	Sep 7

WALTER TROUT

Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	May 9
Birmingham	Town Hal	May 10
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	May 12
Sunderland	Fire Station	May 13
Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 14
Liverpool	Epstein Theatre	May 16
Cambridge	Junction	May 17
Ilkley	Kings Hall	May 18
Gateshead	The Sag	May 19
Manchester	Academy 2	May 20
London	Islington Assembly Hall	May 21

MARTIN TURNER EX-WISHBONE ASH

Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Sep 7
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Sep 8
Havant	The Spring	Sep 9
Worcester	Huntingdon Hall	Sep 10
Sudbury	Quay Theatre	Sep 14
Wokingham	British Legion	Sep 15
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Sep 16
Bath	Chapel Arts Centre	Sep 22

Howden	Shire Hall	Sep 23
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Sep 24
Banbury	Mill Arts Centre	Sep 28
Gravesend	Red Lion	Oct 6
Tavistock	The Wharf	Oct 7
Wigan	Old Courts	Oct 13

SHANIA TWAIN

Glasgow	Hydro	Sep 14, 22
London	O2 Arena	Sep 16
Dublin	3 Arena	Sep 19
Manchester	AO Arena	Sep 25
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Sep 26
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Sep 28

THE UNDERTONES

Brighton	Chalk	Sep 28
Bristol	Academy	Sep 29
Cardiff	Tramshed	Sep 30
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Oct 5
Cambridge	Junction	Oct 6
Leamington Spa	The Assembly	Oct 7
Leeds	University	Oct 19
Newcastle	Boilershop	Oct 20
Manchester	Academy 2	Oct 21

ROGER WATERS

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	May 31
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 2
London	O2 Arena	Jun 6, 7
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 10

Recommended

WHEN RIVERS MEET, ARIELLE

Colchester	Arts Centre	Apr 28
Norwich	Waterfront	Apr 29
Brighton	Komedia	May 4
London	St Pancras Lafayette	May 6
Bristol	The Fleece	May 11
Birmingham	Asylum	May 12
Southampton	1865	May 13
Tavistock	The Wharf	May 14
Barnard Castle	The Witham	May 19
Glasgow	The Garage	May 20
Newcastle	University	May 21
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 25
Bradford	Nightrain	May 26
Manchester	Academy 3	May 27

THE WHITE BUFFALO, LA EDWARDS

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jul 14
Bristol	Academy	Jul 15
Manchester	The Ritz	Jul 16
Glasgow	Academy	Jul 18
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jul 19

THE WHO WITH ORCHESTRA

Hull	Craven Park	Jul 6
Edinburgh	Castle	Jul 8, 9
London	O2 Arena	Jul 12
Derby	County Ground	Jul 14
Bristol	Badminton Estate	Jul 16
Durham	Riverside	Jul 9
St Helens	Stadium	Jul 21
Brighton	County Ground	Jul 23

THE WINERY DOGS

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jun 16
Nottingham	Rock City	Jun 17
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jun 18
Newcastle	Riverside	Oct 3
Glasgow	Garage	Oct 4
Manchester	Academy 2	Oct 6
Bristol	Marble Factory	Oct 7
Norwich	Epic Studios	Oct 8

WISHBONE ASH

Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Apr 28
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	Apr 29
Durham	Northern Kin Festival	Apr 30
Derby	Flowerpot	Sep 1
Chester	Live Rooms	Sep 2
Lincoln	Drill Hall	Sep 4
Hunstanton	Princess Theatre	Sep 5
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Sep 6
Stamford	Corn Exchange	Sep 7
Coventry	Empire	Sep 8
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 9
Lytham St Annes	Lowther Pavilion	Sep 10
Southport	The Atkinson	Sep 12
Kendal	Brewery Arts Centre	Sep 13
Glasgow	The Ferry	Sep 14
Edinburgh	Queen's Hall	Sep 16
Berwick	The Maltings	Sep 18
Newcastle	Wylam Brewery	Sep 19
Stockton-on-Tees	ARC	Sep 20
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Sep 21
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Sep 22
Bury	The Met	Sep 23
Wavendon	The Stables	Sep 24
Shoreham-by-Sea	Ropetackle Arts Centre	Sep 26

Southampton	The Brook	Sep 27
Wimborne	Tivoli	Sep 28
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Sep 29
Gloucester	Guildhall	Sep 30
Pontardawe	Arts Centre	Oct 1
Bristol	St George's Hall	Oct 3
Basingstoke	The Haymarket	Oct 4
London	Islington Academy	Oct 5

WOLFSBANE

Newport	The Patriot	Nov 24
Huddersfield	Parish	Nov 25
Norwich	Brickmakers	Nov 26
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Nov 28
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 29
Newcastle	The Cluny	Nov 30
Bedford	Esquires	Dec 1
Birmingham	Asylum	Dec 3
Sheffield	Greystones	Dec 5
Southampton	Joiner's Arms	Dec 6
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Dec 7
London	King's Cross Water Rats	Dec 8

THE ZOMBIES

Bury	The Met	Apr 28
Taunton	Brewhouse Theatre & Arts	Apr 29
Stockton-on-Tees	ARC	May 3
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	May 4
New Brighton	Floral Pavilion	May 5
Wavendon	The Stables	May 6

Festivals

2000 TREES
BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE, EAGLES OF DEATH METAL, FRANK CARTER, MORE
Cheltenham | Upcote Farm | Jul 6-8

ALFORD ROCK & BLUES FESTIVAL
FOCUS, BAND OF FRIENDS, JACKIE LYNTON, MORE
Alford | Springbok Estate | Jun 30-Jul 2

ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL
SWANS, CAVE IN, SCALPING, CONJURER, MORE
Somerset | Fernhill Farm | Aug 16-19

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
MEGADETH, KILLSWITCH ENGAGE, HELLOWEEN, MORE
Derbyshire | Catton Park | Aug 10-13

CALL OF THE WILD
THOSE DAMN CROWES, GINGER & THE SINNERS, TERRORVISION MORE
Lincolnshire | Showground | May 26-28

CAMBRIDGE FOLK FESTIVAL
JUDY COLLINS, RUFUS WAINWRIGHT, IMELDA MAY, MORE
Cambridge | Cherry Hinton Hall | Jul 27-30

CAMBRIDGE ROCK FESTIVAL
FM, CREGAN & CO, LAURENCE JONES, MORE
Cambridge | Horseheath Lodge | Aug 3-6

CHELSEA BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
ERROL LINTON, CATFISH, BRAVE RIVAL, MORE
London | Shepherd's Bush Bush Hall | May 21

CORNWALL ROCKS
FM, ATOMIC ROOSTER, WHEN RIVERS MEET, MORE
Looe | Tencreek Holiday Park | Oct 6-8

CROPREDY
TOYAH & ROBERT FRIPP, 10CC, STRAWBS, MORE
Copredy | Oxfordshire | Aug 10-12

DESERTFEST
CORROSION OF CONFORMITY, UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS, GRAVEYARD, MORE
London | Camden various venues | May 5-7

DOG DAY AFTERNOON
IGGY POP, BLONDIE, BUZZCOCKS, GENERATION SEX, MORE
London | Crystal Palace Park | Jul 1

DOWNLOAD
METALLICA, SLIPKNOT, BRING ME THE HORIZON
Castle Donington | Racetrack | Jun 8-11

EARTH SHAKE
BLACK SPIDERS, EMPYRE, THE HOT DAMN!, MORE
London | New Cross Inn | Sep 16

DESERTFEST

Corrosion Of Conformity, Uncle Acid & The Deadbeats (pictured) and more descend on North London.

London | Camden various venues | May 5-7

FIRESTORM
KRIS BARRAS, WHEN RIVERS MEET, COLLATERAL, MORE
Manchester | Whitebottom Farm | Aug 11-13

GLASGOW BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
AYNSLEY LISTER, KEN PUSTELNIK'S GROUNDHOGS, MORE
Glasgow | Oran Mor | May 28

GLASTONBURY
GUNS N' ROSES, BLONDIE, ROYAL BLOOD, MORE
Glastonbury | Worthy Farm | Jun 21-25

HARD ROCK HELL 2022
YNGWIE MALMSTEEN, PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS, TYKETTO, MORE
Great Yarmouth | Vauxhall Holiday Park | Nov 2-5

HIGHWAYS
KIP MOORE, MORGAN WADE, JACKSON DEAN, MORE
London | Royal Albert Hall | May 20

LATITUDE
SIOUXSIE SIOUX, MORE
Suffolk | Henham Park | Jul 20-23

LINCOLN BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
HENRIK FREISCHLADER, THE CINELLI BROTHERS, MORE
Lincoln | The Drill | May 6

THE LONG ROAD
BLACKBERRY SMOKE, NICKEL CREEK, JON PARDI, MORE
Leicestershire | Lutterworth Hall | Aug 25-27

LOOE BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
FULL HOUSE PLAYS FRANKIE MILLER, BRAVE RIVAL, CINELLI BROTHERS, MORE
Looe | Tencreek Holiday Park | Dec 1-2

MAID OF STONE
GLENN HUGHES, AIRBOURNE, SKINDRED, MORE
Maidstone | Mote Park | Jul 22, 23

MIDNIGHT SUN WEEKENDER
JOHN FOGERTY, THE PRETENDERS, PRIMAL SCREAM, MORE
Stornoway | Lews Castle | May 25-27

MOSELY FOLK & ARTS
GRAHAM NASH, WILCO, SQUEEZE, MORE
Birmingham | Mosely Park | Sep 1-3

A NEW DAY FESTIVAL
OZRIC TENTACLES, STEVE HILLAGE & SYSTEM 7, CARAVAN, MORE
Faversham | Mount Ephraim Gardens | Aug 18-20

PRIMORDIAL GENERAL MAYHEM
THOSE DAMN CROWES, SOUTH OF SALEM, MORE
Wolverhampton | KK's Steel Mill | Apr 29

RADAR
PERIPHERY, HAKEN, LOATHE, MORE
Manchester | BEC Arena | Jul 28-30

READING AND LEEDS FESTIVALS
THE KILLERS, IMAGINE DRAGONS, MORE
Reading | Richfield Avenue | Aug 25-27
Leeds | Bramham Park | Aug 25-27

SOUTHPORT BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
FULL HOUSE PLAYS FRANKIE MILLER, BRAVE RIVAL, MORE
Southport | The Atkinson | Oct 28

STATION 18 FESTIVAL
HOLLOWSTAR, THE TREATMENT, CHEZ KANE, MORE
Swansea | Hangar 18 | Apr 29-May 1

STEELHOUSE
AIRBOURNE, BLACK STONE CHERRY, KRIS BARRAS, MORE
Ebbw Vale | Hafod-y-Dafal Farm | Jul 28-30

STOCKTON BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
ERROL LINTON, CROW BLACK CHICKEN, BLUE NATION, MORE
Stockton-on-Tees | The ARC | May 13

STONEDEAD
BLUE ÖYSTER CULT, BLACK STAR RIDERS, THERAPY?, MORE
Newark | Showground | Aug 26

SUPERSONIC
GODFLESH, LANKUM, BIG, BRAVE, MORE
Birmingham | Various venues | Sep 1-3

TOMORROW'S GHOSTS
THE MISSION, THEATRE OF HATE, THE 69 EYES, MORE
Whitby | Pavilion | Oct 27-29

TOMORROW'S GHOSTS, SPRING GATHERING
NEW MODEL ARMY, CHRISTIAN DEATH, COLD CAVE, MORE
Whitby | Pavilion | Apr 28, 29

WHITBY BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
ALVIN YOUNGBLOOD HART, REDFISH, THE MILKMEN, MORE
Whitby | Pavilion | Nov 11

WHITBY ROCKS
COLLATERAL, THESE WICKED RIVERS, BRAVE RIVAL, MORE
Whitby | Pavilion | Nov 10

NENE VALLEY ROCK FESTIVAL
TEN YEARS AFTER, ARTHUR BROWN, CORKY LAING'S MOUNTAIN, MORE
Peterborough | Nene Park | Aug 31-Sep 3

Y NOT
ROYAL BLOOD, PAUL WELLER, MORE
Derbyshire | Pikehall | Jul 28-30

KEVIN NIXON

Pixies

London The Roundhouse

A blitz of deathless alt.rock classics, plus a whole heap of *Doggerel*.

★ "While I prefer the original version of *You Really Got Me*, she will defer to the Van Halen version," Black Francis bawls, introducing new-album track *Dregs Of The Wine* with the comedy excuse he and his first wife used to give for their divorce. It's the most exposed and revealing Charles Thompson has got on stage in almost 20 years of Pixies' second-phase shows, and highlights how Boston's indie-rock pioneers are maturing into their rich legend.

Whereas previous tours were dominated by first-era classics – *Where Is My Mind?, Gouge Away, Monkey Gone To Heaven, Debaser* et al – and barely smattered with reunion material, tonight they slot almost all of their sublime eighth album *Doggerel* into their impromptu two-hour set, Francis dictating the next song into an on stage microphone as they go. The effect is to add an enchanting, dark-forest depth to the mythological manias of their youth. Rabid college-punk howls like *Bone Machine, The Holiday Song* and *Mr Grieves* are offset by *Doggerel*'s sweeter seditions: the lycanthropic horniness of *There's A Moon On*, ghost-hunting ballroom ballad *Haunted House*, and *Get Simulated*'s catchy confessions of an uploaded personality. There are deep-diving treats too in campfire apocalypse ditty *Death Horizon*, a billowing *Motorway To Roswell* and a supersonic *Head On*. The end of the set-list reviews the whole: *Wave Of* (melodic) *Mutilation. Where Is My Mind?. Blown Away*.

Mark Beaumont

‘Boston's indie-rock pioneers are maturing into their rich legend.'

Pixie in chief: exposed and revealing.

The Answer

London 100 Club

Happy return from original 'NWOCR' stars.

★ Before Greta Van Fleet brought Led Zeppelin to Gen-Z audiences, before the New Wave Of Classic Rock was a glint in the average rock fan's pint glass, there was The Answer: four affable rockers from County Down who half-exploded in the mid-00s and halted after 2016's *Solas*. Tonight they're back, eschewing pure 'greatest hits' in favour of a set that leans on new album *Sundowners*.

Dishing out slamming hooks and some genuinely majestic solos, openers Oli Brown & The Dead Collective go down well with the roomful of assorted band names plastered across sweaty backs.

Like all the most watchable bands, The Answer have unexpected touches. Things that make them rootsy hippies *and* hard rock sluggers. Bob Dylan intro music on the one hand, dynamite riffs on the other. Cormac Neeson is like a folk preacher circa '67 – years of highs and lows as a singer and father etched into his rich voice – while guitarist Paul Mahon could have been a Marine, all shorn head and sharp chops.

The emphasis on *Sundowners* pays off. *Living On The Line* is a career-topping anthem. The title track carries the psychedelic wooze of latter-day Robert Plant. But often it's old favourites that find them shaking off residual rustiness – the muscle memory of those AC/DC support slots flowing through *Nowhere Freeway* and *Under The Sky*. The passion of men with everything, and nothing to lose.

Polly Glass

The Music Of Paul McCartney

New York City Carnegie Hall

Star-studded, but unfortunately Macca-free tribute concert.

★ Rolling Stones touring drummer Steve Jordan leads tonight's crack house band, which also includes bassist Will Lee, keyboard player Leon Pendarvis and guitarist Smokey Hormel. And while McCartney himself isn't in attendance, the show is pretty amazing nonetheless.

Things kick off with the house band performing a fantastic, high-energy cover of *Oo You* (a deep cut from 1970's *McCartney*) and concludes with the full cast returning to the stage for an ensemble encore of (what else?) *Hey Jude*. In between there are many highlights. Peter Asher is charming as he regales the audience with the tale of how he met Paul, before playing his and Gordon Weller's 1964 hit *A World Without Love*. Patti Smith delivers a sombre reading of *She's Leaving Home*. Shovels & Rope channel The White Stripes with a furious take on *Helter Skelter*. Longtime Wings man Denny Laine plays a heartfelt *Mull Of Kintyre* – complete with bagpipes. NYC's Resistance Revival Chorus nearly bring the house down with their gospel version of *Let It Be*. Graham Nash promises "one of Paul's saddest songs" before doing *For No One*, accompanied by piano and French horn, before Ingrid Michaelson mashes up *I Will* with *Calico Skies*.

A special evening for a special man.

Dave Steinfeld

Marcus King

London The Forum

All hail the new King!

★ Two albums into his career, and at the age of 27, Grammy nominee Marcus King holds the world within his hands. Born in South Carolina, his expert moulding of blues, rock, soul, Americana, pop, gospel, jazz and southern sounds takes the breath away.

How fortunate that King is built like a pair of conjoined brick outhouses, as his frame contains too much guitar and vocal talent for a regular proportioned body. Assisted by a three-piece horn section that doubles up on percussion and vocals, he arrives on stage sporting a Stetson, rhinestones and white-tipped cowboy boots. The sound mix is a bit messy at first, but as the pace of the music dips we discover that King has a voice as thick as molasses but sweeter than honey. He's generous with the spotlight, too, allowing his co-guitarist and keyboard player individual moments of glory. Unfortunately, however, there's also a meaningless drum solo.

Past visits to the UK have seen King taking big steps, just the way Joe Bonamassa did it. Here in London he progressed from Dingwalls to the 100 Club and on to the Electric Ballroom. Tonight The Forum is packed to the rafters. King's appearances in so-called smaller venues such as this one should be savoured, because it surely won't be long before at his shows he's a face – and a 10-gallon hat – on a distant screen.

Dave Ling

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Devin Townsend

Bexhill De La Warr Pavilion

Heavy Devvy levels Bexxy.

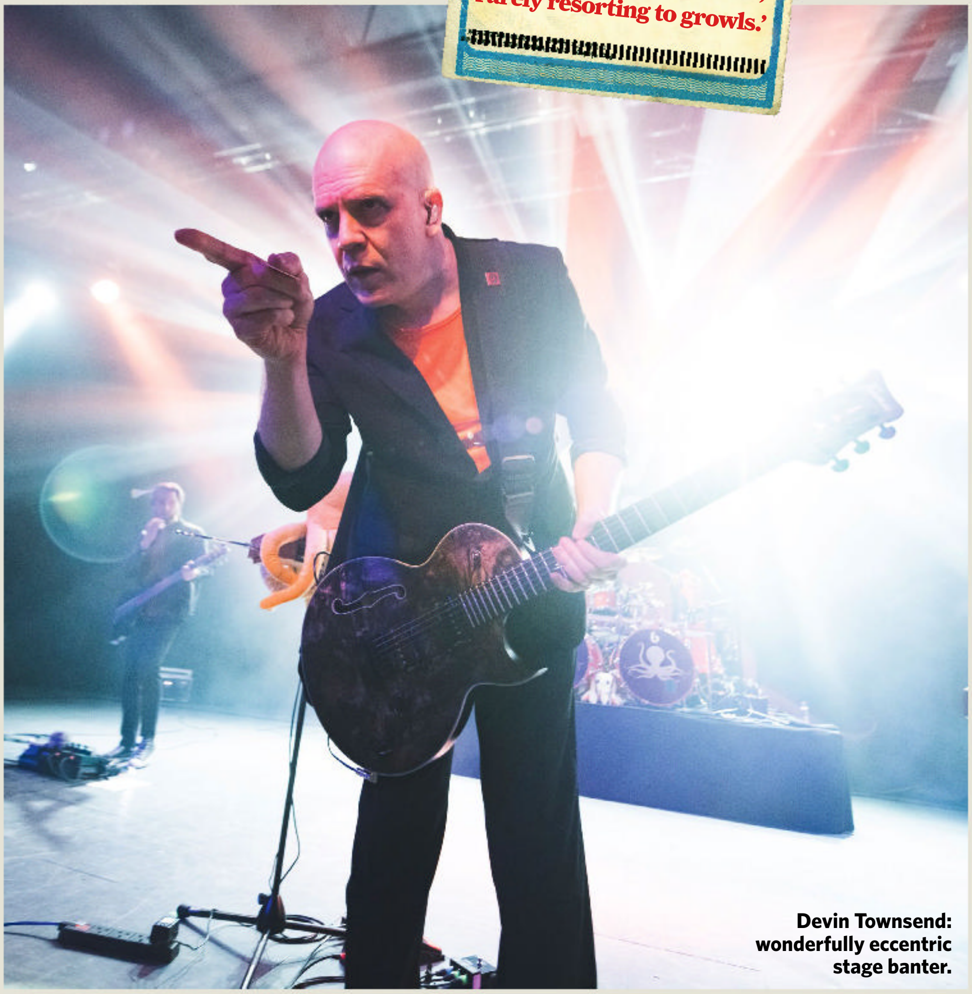
★ Devin Townsend's shows are never for the faint-hearted, and the madcap Canadian's debut in Bexhill-on-Sea begins in a typically oddball manner with his expression of gratitude to driver Mark for cleaning the tour bus's toilet. "It was clogged for two days, and he got down on his hands and knees, right up to his elbows. Thank you, Mark!"

Townsend is on the final lap of a world tour on the back of *Lightwork*, an album that saw him return to the Royal Albert Hall amid triumphant scenes. Swathed in echo and reverb and decorated with samples, the sound is simply gargantuan, with ton-of-bricks drummer Darby Todd the cornerstone of its carnage. For the new album's juddering *Dimensions*, Townsend brings out a Theramin concealed within a child's toy octopus, and the squalling noises it emits cause him to grin like a pantomime villain. The vocals fall on the listenable side of demonic, rarely resorting to growls although predominantly of the sandpaper variety. Late on, the introversion offered by *Deep Peace, Heartbreaker, Spirits Will Collide* and *Call Of The Void* serves to render the tumultuous bombast of *Truth* and *Love* all the more explosive and skull-crushing.

Townsend's stage banter is so wonderfully eccentric that you actually find yourself wishing that he would chat more and sing a little less, although such niggles don't detract from an evening that is a real triumph.

Dave Ling

'The vocals fall on the listenable side of demonic, rarely resorting to growls.'



Devin Townsend: wonderfully eccentric stage banter.

Wet Leg

London Royal Albert Hall

Chart toppers' rapid rise continues.

★ Playing their biggest indoor British show to date, Wet Leg are rounding off a delirious 12-month rocket-ride rise that began with a chart-topping debut album and culminated in a bumper haul of Grammy and Brit awards.

Rhian Teasdale and Hester Chambers came to the RAH to rock like bastards, and they crank up the kick-ass energy on blasting power-pop guitar bashers like *Being In Love*, clobbering glam-racket stomper *Oh No* and non-participation scream-fest *Ur Mum*.

Backed by their three interchangeable boys, the pair share a winning comic chemistry on stage, trading saucy lyrics, wonky guitar licks and gloriously random dance moves. The audience adores them, but it scarcely matters, since they are plainly having a total blast anyway. Inevitably, their career-making signature anthem *Chaise Longue* gets the loudest reaction of the night, with its singalong refrain, dripping with deadpan sarcasm and cheeky innuendo.

That said, behind all this surface levity lurk some darker, angrier songs about heartbreak, social anxiety and shitty boyfriends. Teasdale's tremulous weepie *Obvious* points to hidden depths and wounded feelings. This half-hidden serious side may yet prove to be Wet Leg's salvation when critics and fans tire of their bubblegum punk-pop sauce-pot novelty clowning, but right now they seem invincible, and they know it.

Stephen Dalton

Chris Shiflett

London Scala

Foo Fighters guitarist flying high on rootsy solo tour.

★ For the past week or so, Chris Shiflett has swapped the (presumably much cushier) comforts of Foo Fighters tours for van living. And by the sound of it he's had a thoroughly good time. "It's tight!" he declares delightedly, the memories of his DIY punk beginnings in California hovering somewhere behind his eyes. "It's intimate! It *smells*!"

From the honkytonk-y singalong of *Liar's Word*, Shiflett holds the room with ease and humour, ignoring his wife's order to "never go full cowboy" and donning a stetson. Tonight it's all about him, his tight-but-loose power trio, and the rootsified charm of his solo records. He doesn't mention his other band, and he doesn't need to. The packed Scala is here for him, heckling cheerfully and lapping up every word.

The fingerprints of his producer, Cadillac Three frontman Jaren Johnston, are all over the new songs (hot off an album due later this year). *Black Top White Lines* couldn't be much more TC3 if it wore a trucker cap and shouted: "It's all about the South y'all!" at regular intervals, and it exudes a nu-Nashville swagger and grit that Shiflett clearly loves.

Support band Dea Matrona join for a rollicking encore of the Stones' *Dead Flowers*, which Shiflett follows up with Merle Haggard and Hank Williams Jr covers, closing with his own sunny *West Coast Town*. Maybe we should all 'go full cowboy' more often.

Polly Glass

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

London The Troxy

Aussie psychedelicists rock hard winding up their European tour.

★ Having blown the roof off London's cavernous Alexandra Palace the night before, tonight the 12-legged beast that is King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard are in the relatively intimate surroundings of the Troxy. Mindful of the new venue – a mere 3,100 capacity, as opposed to the Pally's 10,000 – they've jettisoned the previous evening's set-list of largely creamy and groove-based psychedelia in favour of gnarly and hard-rocking psychedelia.

Thrash metal opener *Hell* dictates the terms for what's to follow as its twisting riff is met with a huge roar from the combustible audience which detonates in kind. With barely a pausing for breath or breaks, each song collides with the next with a relentless ferocity as singer-guitarist Stu Mackenzie shreds spectacularly with Joe Walker and Cook Craig.

With more than 23 studio albums to dip into, it stands to reason that not everything strikes hard, and the middle section of the show – with *K.G.L.W.* and a meandering *The Wheel* - feels a little labored. But victory is theirs. Michael Cavanagh's Afrobeat-inspired drumming on *Ice V* twists and turns from subtle shuffles to giant steps with skill and grace, and the rest of the band create moments of wonderfully sustained beauty and joy. With the audience truly bested, tonight's show is a fitting end to the tour.

Julian Marszalek

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'Nova Twins are leading the way for a new breed of star to enter the spotlight.'

Nova Twins / Witch Fever / Uninvited

Birmingham O2 Academy 2

Breakout stars render genre redundant.

★ Booked for this year's Glastonbury, Nova Twins aren't struggling with similar issues of gender parity when it comes to programming a killer live bill. Glasgow's Uninvited kick the night off with ultra-hooky 90s-style alt.rock in the vein of a ballsier Elastica, then Witch Fever combine the doom-prowl of Sabbath with roiling punk rock. It's a tonally diverse offering, but one that is lapped up eagerly by a packed-in audience, testament to the genre-disregarding qualities of the new generation.

"Do we have any boss bitches in?" asks Twins vocalist Amy Love, capturing in one sentence the sense of swagger at the heart of the South London duo. Stylistically they're a pick 'n' mix. Songs like *Fire & Ice, Puzzles* and *Bullet* are propelled by RATM-style stomping rhythms, while the likes of *Taxi* and *Losing Sleep* take their ever-present thrumming electronica and turn it into a full rave, with songs like *Cleopatra* and *Toolbox* even veering into slinky R&B territory.

Throwing up reference points as diverse as Billie Eilish, The Prodigy and Bikini Kill, the set fuses dancefloor fillers with a tangible sense of empowerment that makes the nu gen feel truly refreshing. Nova Twins are leading the way for a new breed of stylistically adventurous, socially conscious star to enter the spotlight.

Rich Hobson

Nova Twins: a duo with real swagger.

W.A.S.P.

London The Roundhouse

Blackie Lawless and co. are showing signs of having lost their sting.

★ A 40th-anniversary tour really should be so much better than what we are presented with tonight. What kind of a band come out and open with a medley of four of their best tunes – *On Your Knees, The Flame, The Torture Never Stops and Inside The Electric Circus*? Why cut them down? Why not play all of them in full? And what kind of W.A.S.P. set doesn't include *Tormentor, Sleeping In The Fire, 95-Nasty, Mean Man*, or *anything* from *The Headless Children* except the band's remake of The Who classic *The Real Me* – as part of another friggin' medley? Since finding God, Blackie Lawless has been resistant to performing *Animal (Fuck Like A Beast)*, the song that sealed W.A.S.P.'s notoriety back in the 80s, but this evening it's included in truncated form in the same medley as *The Real Me*. Maybe Lawless will only risk going halfway to hell?

Blackie, these are meant to be 40th-anniversary shows you're playing. Your band has made 15 albums, you can't say 'Goodnight' and walk off stage after 50 minutes, that's pitiful. And then there are the ugly rumours of lip-syncing that plagued the entire tour, allegations that this writer – a follower of the band since being blown away by them at the Lyceum in London in '84 – is, regrettably, prepared to believe.

Blackie, you can do better than this. And should that no longer be possible, then it's time to stop.

Dave Ling

Algiers

Berlin Hole44

Full AgitSoulMetal racket.

★ Conceptually, the notion of an Otis Redding-style hollering soul man fronting a politically radical, sample-heavy, electro-noise avant-funk agit-rock collective is pretty thrilling. In the flesh, Algiers are a slightly more wobbly prospect, but this show is still a gloriously dense hot mess of post-punk sonics, hip-hop polemic and heavy-metal thunder. Although singer Franklin James Fisher's sloganeering lyrics sometimes lack nuance, the Anglo-American quartet pack plenty of punch on fiery, anti-fascist, anti-capitalist battle cries like *The Underside Of Power* and *Death March*.

Algiers make a rich, rowdy, ambitious racket but they sometimes lack focus. Bass guitarist and keyboard player Ryan Mahan's stern-faced, rubber-limbed, throat-slashing dance moves also bring a jarring note of unintended comedy, distracting from Fisher's more coolly assured, less needy stage presence.

This set reaches a pummelling climax with the machine-gun gallop of *There Is No Year* and the booming Godzilla-stomp *Walk Like A Panther*. But songs showcasing Fisher's warm-blooded, bluesy testifying hit harder. In a quietly powerful aside, he explains how gospel-infused lament *I Can't Stand It!* was inspired by his recent heartbroken suicide attempt. Algiers cut deepest in this more emotional mode, balancing the political with the personal.

Stephen Dalton

Blackberry Smoke

London The Roundhouse

A night of bulletproof southern rock'n'roll.

★ Charlie Starr thanks the security guards as they hand out water to the breathless front row. It's a world away from the divey honky-tonks Blackberry Smoke started out in more than 20 years ago in Georgia. "There'd be waitresses there [at the front] taking drinks orders, probably sellin' *drugs* too – cash only!" Starr says, grinning mischievously. For a second, the singer/guitarist's hard-partying past gleams through his family-friendly warmth. "Now it'd be Apple Pay…"

It's fair to say Blackberry Smoke's debauched days are over. They're family men, with adoring fans and a foolproof catalogue to showcase (unlike so many bands, they vary their set list each night). Accordingly, the stuffed Roundhouse gets two filler-free hours of southern rock anthems. Dependable in a good way. The likes of *Six Ways To Sunday* and *Waiting For The Thunder* are instant crowd-winners, while *Live It Down* is all low-slung, crunchy riff-meat.

On one level, Blackberry Smoke *is* Charlie Starr. He writes the songs. He does all the talking. He's visibly wired to this music like no one else. And yet the band's appeal lies in its ensemble nature; brotherhood members who shine through their instruments, and smiles exchanged with fans. Drummer Brit Turner, diagnosed with a brain tumour last year, gets the biggest cheer of the night. It's a heartwarming moment, in a show full of them.

Polly Glass

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The Inspector Cluzo
London The Roundhouse

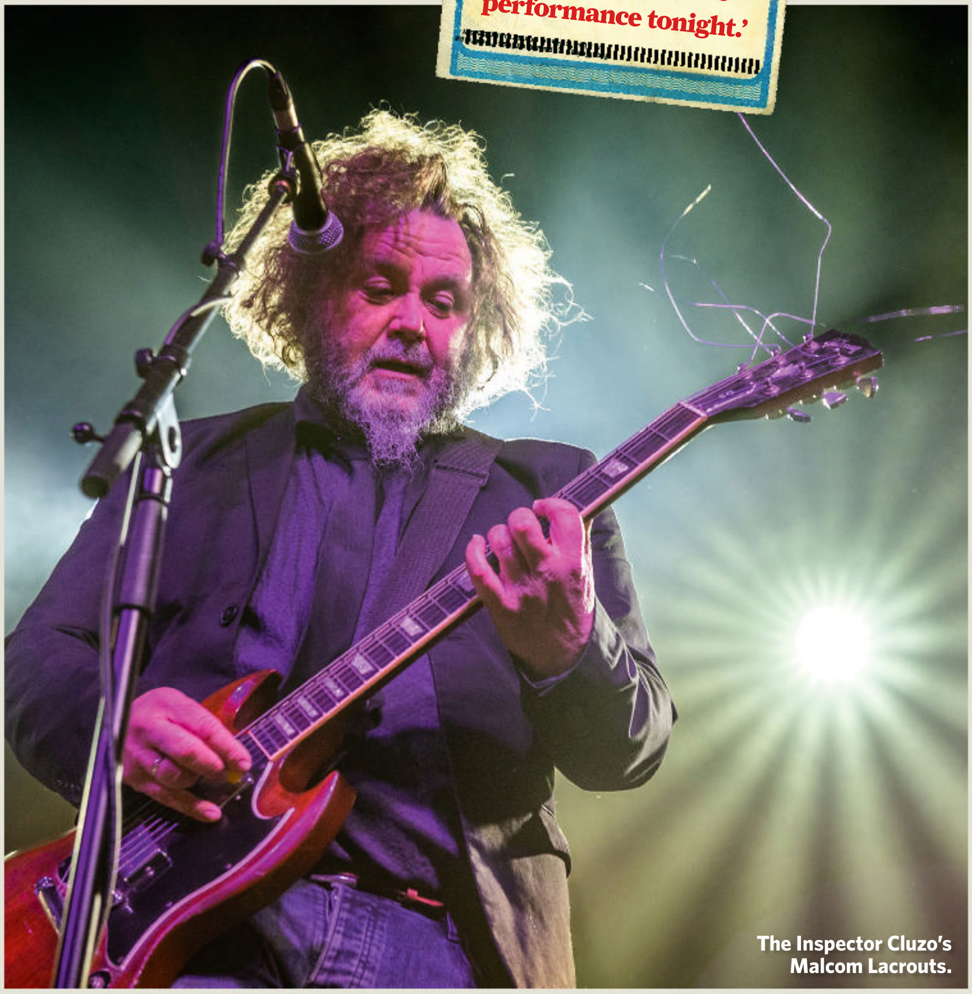
Mont de Marsan agriculturalists hit pay dirt.

★ One imagines the majority of tonight's audience are largely unfamiliar with the works of The Inspector Cluzo, a pair of fiercely independent Gascony farmers now on their ninth album. Yet while punters are here to witness headliners Eels, they're certainly not above affording an ovation to the unlikely, some might say odd, couple at centre stage. Taking advantage of the expectation-free, relative anonymity of playing to someone else's fans, the Cluzo pack their set with choice selections from their latest album *Horizon*, a virtual agro-ecological manifesto set to an engaging, hook-heavy combination of classic rock swagger and bass player-free funk.

Sartorially correct drummer Mathieu Jourdan carefully hangs up his cap before setting to work, while Zep/Page-reminiscent guitarist/schizophrenic vocalist Laurent Lacrouts gruffly sets about *Act Local, Think Global*, punctuating raw-throated, right-thinking diatribes with irresistibly sweet, upper-register counter-vocals that wouldn't seem terribly out of place on a Jeff Buckley record. Lyrics are hard to misinterpret. You know where you are with a song called *Running A Family Farm Is More Rock Than Playing Rock 'N' Roll Music*, but, part-time or not, there's nothing half-baked about TIC's performance tonight. By the end of an exceptional assault on the Hound Dog Taylor-esque *The Armchair Activist*, Eels' audience are eating out of Cluzo's calloused hands.

Ian Fortnam

'There's nothing half-baked about TIC's performance tonight.'



The Inspector Cluzo's Malcom Lacrouts.

GETTY

The Hold Steady
London Electric Ballroom

The first night of their annual Weekender misses some needed pizzazz.

★ A devotional air hangs around this evening's show. But then, what with this being the first gig of The Hold Steady's annual Weekender in London, when the band pitches up for a two-night residency at the Electric Ballroom, plus a third intimate show elsewhere and sundry events, this shouldn't come as too much of a surprise. For the converts gathered here, this is their Christmas, Easter and birthday all rolled into one.

Indeed, such is the level of worship for The Hold Steady that the overwhelmingly male audience pores over set-lists, debates what should and shouldn't be included, and has a heavy emotional investment in what's going down on stage. On the other hand, the few agnostics in the audience may need a bit of convincing. Despite the energy emanating from the stage, the whole shebang feels a little flat thanks to a muddy sound mix that's rarely resolved.

Consequently, opener *Hornets! Hornets!* lacks an essential buzz, and *Hurricane J* feels more like a zephyr. Looking like Ernie Bilko dancing with the moves of a chicken on a hot plate, Craig Finn is one of the unlikeliest rock stars ever, but his enthusiasm and sincerity carries the air-punching audience, especially during spirited romps through *Stuck Between Stations* and *Sequestered In Memphis*. But no *Stay Positive* at times like these? Shame.

Julian Marszalek

Cherie Currie / Blue Ruin
Northampton Roadmender

Queens of noise – vintage and new.

★ The voice of The Runaways and renowned chainsaw artist Cherie Currie is back in the UK for her On The Road To Ruin tour. Not solely a nostalgia party for fans of the pioneering all-female rockers, but also the first chance to play songs from *Blvds Of Splendor*, an album she made more than a decade ago with input from Billy Corgan, Slash and Duff McKagan.

The gig takes place in a room outside the main venue, so a small but enthusiastic audience greets openers Blue Ruin, a colourfully attired and musically infectious all-female punk foursome. The pair of New Zealanders, one Italian and one Bristolian fill the room with cartoonish energy and spirit of the Ramones riffs from their album *Hooligan's Happy Hour*. The songs are part defiant (*Still Not Asking For It*), sometimes schlocky (*Dracula, Sarah Killed Her Boyfriend*) but all fantastic.

It's a perfect set-up for the fox they've been waiting for, Cherie Currie, whose charisma easily draws out the audience with Runaways oldies (*California Paradise, Midnight Music*) and album highlights *Mr X* and *You Wreck Me* (not the Tom Petty number). A poignant *Life On Mars?* is dedicated to her brother Don, who passed away on the eve of this tour. The *Cherry Bomb* crowd singalong sends everyone out onto the mean streets of Northampton with huge grins.

Claudia Elliott

Bob Vylan
London Omeara

The shape of anti-Nazi agit-rap-rock fury to come.

★ Sounding like prime-time Black Sabbath with Stormzy on vocals, grime-punk duo Bob Vylan are only two songs into this sold-out benefit show for War Child and they've already turned the compact venue into a stage-diving maelstrom. Flirting with mainstream success following a Top 20 album and a MOBO award last year, this fiercely independent British duo know how to work a crowd, beginning with "light stretching and meditation" before cranking up the fiery polemic, booming live drums and pre-recorded guitar riffs for maximum moshpit mayhem. Commanding frontman Pascal Robertson-Foster prowls the stage spitting Public Enemy quotes over powerhouse slam-dance grooves. His machine-gun diatribes against racism, injustice, Winston Churchill, the BBC and the royal family take no prisoners.

At their best, Bob Vylan combine the exhilarating communal blast of classic hardcore punk, hip-hop and metal. But their playback-driven sound also has its limitations, occasionally recalling Sleaford Mods at their most formulaic. Even so, these rap-rock revolutionaries come over as warm and funny, inviting a friend on stage to celebrate his recent engagement. "There's one thing we love here at Bob Vylan and that is love itself," Robertson-Foster says before launching into *Pretty Songs*, a pulverising ditty about punching Nazis in the face. Fight the power.

Stephen Dalton

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Singer and songwriter **Steve Harley** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Jo Kendall**

As a teenager he'd been involved in newspaper journalism, but by 1970 Deptford lad Steve Harley was taking a guitar around London folk clubs, going from a "weekend mod" phase to being a "weekend hippie". The troubadour side mixed with the emerging glam and art-rock scenes, and Harley found fame with the wonderfully arch and flamboyant Cockney Rebel. Currently on the road with his Acoustic Band, he tells *CR* about some of the sparks that lit his imagination.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

Before Radio 1 existed we had The Light Programme on the airwaves. My mother was a jazz singer, and on Sundays there'd be big-band music and she'd sing along in the kitchen. For pop it would have been from my older cousins who were buying Buddy Holly and Elvis. I was very big on Buddy, even up to this day.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

My first live performances were as a floor-spotter, which they call open-mic now, in folk clubs – you'd put your hand up in the audience to be spotted and get up and play. I was on the dole for a year playing in [clubs such as] Bunjies, Les Cousins, The Troubadour. The first song I ever performed was in 1970 and called *Laid In The Shade*. It was absolute rubbish, but the tune worked. I went back to it in 1974 and added new lyrics. That became *Make Me Smile*.

THE GUITAR HERO

Frank Zappa. He was a one-off – unique as a composer, as a wit, and then as a guitar player. He played jazz, basically, and he hardly ever bent a note, it was all just brilliant technique. Play *Stink-Foot* from *Apostrophe (')*; he rips off this solo out of nowhere that is just beyond historic.

THE SINGER

I took more pleasure than I can tell you in acquiring the services of Eddi Reader. On my latest album [*Uncovered*], Eddi can break your heart. That's the voice that most women would want. She duets with me on an old Newfoundland folk song, *Star Of Belle Isle*, and that was pretty special. She came and played with my band, a string quartet and gospel singers in Glasgow last year. When she walked on I didn't even introduce them. I walked off and she did a couple of numbers to start, and that was a big moment.

THE SONGWRITER

It's Dylan, but I'd be hard-pressed to put him above Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell or Cat Stevens. These people are astonishing. I must put Bob at the top because he's the one I keep fighting to interpret, to understand the mystery. The others are more straightforward.

THE WORST RECORD I MADE

In the eighties I made several tracks that were going to be on an album called *El Grand Senor*, and I allowed a couple of keyboard players to go rampant – in those days it was all multi-synthesisers, polyphonic. Three tracks ended up on an album called *Yes You Can*. I heard one or two lately, because fans have been asking for us to include these titles live, so I'm listening to them at home and thinking: "God, that's a bloody racket."

"Eddi Reader can break your heart. That's the voice that most women would want."

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

It's Dylan, but I'm torn between *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde*. They're both just ridiculously brilliant pieces of work. But if I was on a desert island it would be *Blonde On Blonde*, because I could spend my life working out the meanings and the allegories inside *Visions Of Johanna*, which mesmerises me, frankly.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

Longpigs. Crispin [Hunt, vocals] was a highly talented young man who now heads [royalties collection agency] PRS. Richard Hawley was the lead guitarist; he can write a song or two! I saw them on *Top Of The Pops* playing *Lost Myself*, and I recognised something much deeper than this pseudo neo-punk thing they were doing. On their two albums every song cuts the mustard. I thought I was seeing a stadium band in-the-making, then they were gone.

THE CULT HERO

For someone who's not mainstream-famous but is massively talented, I would say Martin Simpson. He's written some fantastic songs and is lyrically brilliant. It's got that Yorkshireman's eye for detail when they get straight to the point. He played on the last album.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

Reach Out (I'll Be There) by the Four Tops. I was a huge Tamla fan as a teenager, and for me and my pals in south London, Motown was our dance music. This is also for my first love and lover, Glenda White from Wickford. *Reach Out* was our song.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

I travel mostly in silence. But when I am in the mood to listen to something – like last week, when I drove five hundred miles for a photo shoot – I play Beethoven, the greatest of them all. There's a top line of talent that makes me swoon: Virginia Woolf, Steinbeck, Hemingway, TS Eliot. Beethoven is at the top of the highest echelons.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

A Case Of You by Joni Mitchell. *'I could drink a case of you, still I'd be on my feet.'* It's a beautiful observation and image. It breaks my heart with passion.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'll do a Bowie and I won't have one [a funeral]! But if I do it's back to Zappa, and *Peaches En Regalia* from *Hot Rats*. It's a fabulous melody and production, and quite uplifting. I don't want misery.

Steve Harley's Acoustic Band tour from May 13 to July 1.

EDDI READER: GETTY

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